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THE CONFLICTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

By

W. D. NIVEN, M.A., D.D.

PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY IN TRINITY COLLEGE,
GLASGOW



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To
MY WIFE

Moxey, Mary

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PREFACE

THE central historical problem of early Christian times is to explain the Catholic Church as it appeared in the fourth century. How did it come to be the entity that it was? That it either was, or should have been, *semper eadem* in every particular from the days of Apostles onwards, are positions that only ignorance can maintain. Some hold that what was implicit in the beginning became explicit by the end of the period we are considering. Others hold that into an original stream there flowed or seeped external elements, most of them undesirable. The tendency of the former view, as exemplified in Loisy's *The Gospel and the Church*, is to induce the belief that whatever development took place was not only inevitable but right. The latter view, as exemplified in Harnack's *What is Christianity?* tends to represent the development as in the main a regrettable corruption of essential Christianity, however unavoidable. Neither view, to my mind,

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is satisfactory. The history of the Church, and of the Christianity it exhibited and embodied, is the story of the development of a living organism in its environment.

The two great factors in this development were, on the one hand, creative personalities like St. Paul, Irenæus, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and Athanasius; and, on the other hand, the series of conflicts in which the Church was involved. The two sets of factors cannot be separated, but one or other may be emphasised. This work deals directly with the latter. Even there, it is not exhaustive; but I have selected the biggest conflicts that proved to be most far-reaching in their issues. I hope to have made clear—what I find young students of history need to have impressed on them—that the past is not dead. The more important of the problems which confronted and sometimes divided the early Church, confront and divide Christians still. Not one of the conflicts dealt with was finished; in some form or other they have been permanent.

In writing on the history of early Christianity one is faced with two difficulties. In the first place, through the regrettable zeal of Christian Emperors,

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who ordered the writings of heretics and pagan Apologists to be destroyed, we have only a few survivals—some of them quite recently discovered—of what was a very extensive literature. We know the views of most of the early heretics and pagan critics only from refutations in Catholic works. However accurate those citations are, we are in a similar position to what would face us if we could gain knowledge of the tenets of one political party almost exclusively from the criticisms of its opponents. The few recent discoveries of long-lost heretical works have in some cases profoundly modified what used to be believed concerning them.

In the second place, chronology is manifestly important, but is difficult to determine. The mystery religions, as we shall see, had points which justify the drawing of a close parallel between them and Christianity. Knowledge of exact chronology, however, is exceedingly small. Plainly, there was as much chance of their being influenced by Christianity as of their influence on it—a fact for which some writers on the mysteries do not seem to allow.

Considerations of space have prevented the “documenting” of the various chapters. In an appendix

P R E F A C E

will be found a classified selection of books available in English for those who desire fuller knowledge on the main topics handled.

W. D. N.

Trinity College, Glasgow.

1930

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I

THE ENVIRONMENT

It has for long been common to say that Christianity came to the world in the fulness of the times. In a real enough sense that is true, but not quite in the sense in which it used to be held. We now realise that many of the old illustrations of the general teleological argument are futile. Thus, so long as it was believed that the Creation was a series of sudden acts covering literally six days, the restfulness of the colour green to the human eye and the prevalence of green in vegetation could be used to support an inference of a wise beneficent Providence. Such an illustration has lost convincing power, because we know that the eye has had a long history, and is what it is because nature, including vegetation, is what it is. If one roughly tears a sheet of paper so that there are jagged edges, nothing can be inferred from the inevitable fitness of the "capes" on one edge to the "bays" on the

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other, save that the two originally belonged together; many of the "adjustments" of the old teleological argument are now seen to be of that order.

We must try to avoid a similar futility of argument about the "preparation" of the world for Christianity when Christianity appeared in the first century. We tend to separate much too drastically between Christianity and the world to which it came, as though Christianity from the first had been a fairly well-developed system either of doctrines or institutions, which found a world surprisingly prepared for it. As a matter of fact, a little study of primitive Christianity reveals how very difficult it is to say precisely what it was either in doctrine or in institution. It soon becomes clear that it was rather indefinite and very unfixd. What was new in the most primitive Christianity? is a question exceedingly difficult to answer. The only really new element was just Jesus Himself and the spirit wherewith He animated His followers. That spirit gradually clothed itself with a body, and the elements of the body were found in, and taken from, the world as it was. In any age Christianity is to a large extent what it is, because the world at that

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time is what it is. Thus it is easy to show how systems of theology have used the conceptions and modes of expression prevalent at the time of their formulation. Early Christianity found what it needed in ideas which were in the "atmosphere" of its time, and all its development was conditioned by what its own spirit could use of what the age presented. Like every organism, Christianity, as it gradually unfolded itself in doctrine and institution, was, so far, the product of its environment. Like every living thing, it selected from the environment what it could profitably absorb and use. In so absorbing and using those elements it transformed them.

We have a clear case of deliberate selection in St. Paul's address on Mars Hill, of which address the major portion is a skilful blend of Stoic and Epicurean teaching. That the early Church consciously set itself often to the task of deliberate selection is an almost fantastic thought. None the less, it is undoubted that the process went on and was indeed inevitable. Men cannot speak without employing the thought and speech current in their time.

We must disabuse our minds, then, of the notion

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that the Christian Church suddenly appeared teaching certain things which it had "supernaturally" received to a world which surprisingly had come to nearly the same ideas in other ways. Christianity and the world were not separate entities which came into contact and were found to be amazingly suited to each other, any more than a newly-created human eye came to rejoice in the green fields "prepared" for it.

The world to which Christianity came was the regions surrounding the Mediterranean. No doubt at a very early period the new religion spread farther; certainly to Arabia, and probably quite early as far as the coast of India. But such outposts of the Faith have no real historical importance. What concerns ecclesiastical history for the first four centuries is the development within the region named. Christianity spread till it mastered that whole territory, and its development, doctrinally and institutionally, was conditioned by its origin within that region, and by what it encountered in its progress towards mastery. We cannot begin to understand the conflict and victory of Christianity until we make clear to ourselves the essential features of the world

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which it set out to conquer; so we must consider in what sort of environment Christianity found itself.

EXTERNAL CONDITIONS

After some hesitation, to which we must refer later, Christians came to the clear conviction that their religion was for all mankind, and that their most pressing duty was to offer their Faith for the acceptance of all. The external conditions were exceedingly favourable for rapid propaganda.

The whole world with which Christianity was almost exclusively concerned was a political unity. The Roman Empire was the strongest and longest-lasting "League of Nations" that the world has yet known. It was indeed far more than a league; it was tending more and more to become a coalescence of peoples. Nothing could be more at variance with the truth than to represent the Empire as a mass of heterogeneous elements held together by ruthless military power. For the large size of the Empire its military forces, so far as numbers went, were "a contemptible little army." The legions were massed for the defence of the frontiers six thousand miles

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long, and did not approach half a million men all told. Except in Judæa, Rome on the whole ruled with the glad acquiescence of the constituent peoples, many of whom knew for the first time in their history the blessings of peace and even-handed justice. From the Tyne to the Euphrates; from the Rhine and the Danube to the Sahara; from the Atlantic to the Caucasus—a vast variety of peoples were welded together as they had not been before, as they have never been since. Within that vast region the word “foreigner” was more and more losing all meaning.

Another very important fact was that for at least the first two centuries throughout a large portion of that great territory Greek was in use. Throughout a considerable area it was the only language; over a much wider area it was a second language. Not only east of the Adriatic, but in the seaports of Egypt, in Sicily, and South Italy, and in the valley of the Rhone, it was the prevailing tongue. In Rome itself there was a large Greek-speaking community at each end of the social scale. The large slave population spoke Greek, and among the upper classes Greek was fashionable. Only in the prov-

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inces of Africa, Gaul, Spain, and Britain was Greek little known; in the cities of those regions Latin was predominant.

If we contrast the first century with our own, what a difference those two points constitute with a view to propaganda. To-day a movement starting from Jerusalem and aiming at London would be met every few hundred miles with the two barriers—national and linguistic. In overcoming them much time would be lost. In the early centuries those two difficulties simply did not exist.

The communications of the Empire were excellent. The Mediterranean was effectively kept clear of pirates, and the highways remain to this day a monument to the skill of the Roman engineers. The roads were not so safe from robbers as the sea was, yet on this point they scarcely suffer from a comparison with English highways in the eighteenth century. Along those highways radiating from Rome a great stream of traffic passed. Travel, for a great variety of reasons—business, study, health, pleasure, the public service, and so on—was very common. The Roman gentry did the “grand tour” as much as the well-to-do of later times; business

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men journeyed from one end of the Mediterranean to the other as commonly as they cross the Atlantic now; officers of the army and Government officials were frequently being transferred; slaves were often moved from one city to another. The highly centralised system of government drew all things to Rome and from Rome re-distributed them. The importance of this movement of so much traffic and so many people lies here: that ideas were disseminated over wide areas with extraordinary rapidity.

The high roads leading from city to city and converging on Rome dominated the strategy of the Christian propaganda. St. Paul followed the main roads. He once nearly made a mistake. He had arrived at the straits between Europe and Asia, and thought of turning eastwards into Bithynia. The Spirit suffered him not. The vision indicated, not this backwater movement, but the highway into Europe and towards the centre. For three centuries preachers were content to establish Christianity in the cities. It was sound policy. The cities were the strategic points. From them the movement might be trusted to penetrate in time to the surrounding villages; but it was highly important to place the

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leaven in the vital centres. It is a little doubtful if modern missionary enterprise has always been equally wise.

INTELLECTUAL ATMOSPHERE

If ideas could be easily transmitted, there were plenty of ideas in the early centuries to transmit, and a prevailing interest in them. It was an age of eager curiosity. People were curious to learn all about their fellow-subjects of the vast Empire. The danger was not stagnation for lack of new thoughts, it was paralysis of the powers to absorb and assimilate the bewildering variety of ideas that filled the air. It was a time of resolute effort to make some sort of synthesis of elements drawn from a great variety of sources. Men found themselves in a much bigger world, to which many of their old thoughts were quite inadequate. Many were driven to a sceptical attitude. Pilate's question, "What is truth?" doubtless expressed the position of many. Others were trying to arrive at truth by combining the best of the chief philosophies. In such a perplexed world, men who spoke with the note of unclouded assur-

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ance, as the Christian preachers did, could always secure an audience, and get an interested hearing.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

The two first Christian centuries in many respects witnessed social transformations similar to what we have experienced since the Industrial Revolution, and very markedly since the World War.

There was a tendency, started long before, for the population to be concentrated in the cities. Rome was as familiar as we are with the problem of a large class chronically unemployed, a problem which the Government palliated as ours does by a system of doles.

In the provinces, old social distinctions were replaced by new. The aristocracy now consisted of those who had been granted Roman citizenship. In the original Roman world the old aristocracy had suffered the same vicissitudes as that of every modern nation has done. Several of the great families were extinct; several were on the point of extinction; many were impoverished, some of them by their fault, some by their misfortune, or honour-

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ably by the heavy charges which the higher services of the State involved. The governor of a province, on retiral, was expected to leave his own memorial in the form of a theatre or an aqueduct or some other work which it had almost ruined him to provide. The decline of the aristocracy of birth made way for the new aristocracy of wealth. Money talked then as now. It covered lack of pedigree, education, or manners. By the second century high Roman Society had seen the same kind of curious turns of fortune's wheel as modern society has witnessed since mid-Victorian days.

Further, in the first century there existed numerous kinds of societies or clubs—*Collegia*, *Sodalitates*—and within meetings of such societies all the social distinctions which obtained outside were laid aside. The importance of this, for our purpose, is to show that social distinctions were losing their sharpness and that the brotherhood of all men was far from an unfamiliar idea. The Stoics had taught it, the unity of the Empire suggested it, the societies in their meetings realised it.

Of the condition of slaves one needs to speak with caution. Sweeping general statements are obviously

likely to be wrong. Slaves were not treated everywhere alike. They were subject, without remedy, without self-defence, and without the possibility of outside intervention, to any caprice of their masters. Yet, broadly speaking, it would seem to be true that at this period a spirit of humanity was more and more prevailing. In many cases slaves acquired their freedom on very easy terms or gratuitously as a reward of faithful service. Many slaves occupied positions of high trust, responsibility, and influence. The heathen complained that Christianity had been spread by slaves influencing the women and children of their lords' families. The institution of slavery, indeed, so opposed to the spirit of Christianity, as Christians came to see after long centuries of reflection, was of immeasurable importance in the early centuries for the propagation of the religion.

If caution is needed in speaking of slavery in the Empire, one needs to be still more careful in statements as to the position of women. In popular discourses and writings one finds triumphant declarations as to the debt of women to Christianity. Before the Gospel was preached, women, we are told, were in a miserable plight, and it is to Chris-

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tianity that they owe all their emancipation. The truth is that it is not easily proved that Christianity made much practical difference to the status and freedom of women for many a long century. It is undoubted that the legal status of women was deplorable. In the eyes of the law a woman was not a person. She was never independent. All her days she was *in manu*—under the authority—of a man: first her father, then her husband, or, failing these, her nearest male relative. Even in this respect we must remember that ages had to pass before her legal position was very considerably improved. Only in our own times have her rights been finally established.

Again, we must bear in mind that women in different regions enjoyed varying degrees of practical freedom. In the East she was more secluded than in the West; but even in the East a variety of careers was open to her, and in Rome many more. Highly educated women were not rare, and the blue-stocking of the first century afforded the same material to the comedian as she did in the nineteenth. There were writers, like Seneca, who came

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as near advocating sex equality as any under Victoria.

Beyond the circumstance—important enough—that Christianity from the first gave women a place in the service and the services of the Church alongside men such as no contemporary religion did, there is no evidence of any considerable change that the new religion wrought in this regard. Nay, more; the breadth of the charter of equality—there is neither male nor female—on grounds of expediency had to be limited in the case of Greek cities by St. Paul himself; and the misunderstanding of a local and temporary for a universal prescription led to the retardation of the process of emancipation.

MORALITY

Many lurid pictures have been drawn of the moral state of the ancient Græco-Roman world. There is justification for them. Rome had its own vices, and the conquest of Greece introduced new ones. Both Greece and Rome were further infected by the streaming westward of farther-Eastern influences. The East, nursery of religion and piety,

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had at the same time shown horrifying ingenuity in discovering vicious practices of which Rome had not dreamed. The Orontes flowed into the Tiber and made it a filthy stream. The first chapter of Romans contains a restrained but sufficiently clear delineation of what happened. Roman historians and satirists paint such pictures of Society that we can only say it is well that for us they are veiled in the decency of a dead language. From such sources we might infer a world rotten to the core.

In Roman society, when the Empire arose, marriage was largely out of fashion, and such marriage as there was admitted of facile divorce. Any reason or lack of reason was deemed sufficient. To think that women were always the victims of this state of thing is to misunderstand. It was considered almost odd if a lady lived with the same man for any considerable length of time. If she were faithful to one husband only, it was reckoned worth commemorating on her tomb that she had been *univira*—a circumstance which probably goes far to explain the insistence on husband of one wife and wife of one husband in the Pastoral Epistles.

Yet against the blackness of this representation

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of the morals of the Empire other considerations of a more pleasant nature must be carefully set. If marriage was so neglected, the Emperor strove by legislation and admonition to restore its sacred and binding character. If dark pictures are drawn, it is heathen writers who protest against their worst features. Nor must this be forgotten—those writers depict almost exclusively only the morals of high Society, the smart set, the idle rich in the large cities, chiefly Rome itself. On the life of the remoter regions they afford us no light. Suppose that most of our literature perished, and that the only guide to the morals of the early twentieth century available in 4000 A.D. were a few books of sermons against the sins of Society, a totally false impression would result. Every word such preachers said would be quite true, but they do not give, nor profess to give, a complete account of the moral situation of our day. Now, that is scarcely an exaggeration of the position we are in with respect to our knowledge of the general life of the first century. We have an account of the vicious side of the life of Society in Rome, little more.

That there was another side cannot be questioned.

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A society which can criticise itself is not rotten to the core. We know that several reforming agencies were at work. There were the Jews in every large centre attracting to the Synagogues numbers of Gentiles and teaching their own high morality. There were philosophers like the Stoics, whose ethic in so many points approached Christian teaching. There were the Cynics, the "friars of paganism," hurrying up and down the world preaching righteousness and advocating the simple life. There were the mystery religions, attracting widespread attention and all more or less closely associating morality with religion.

It is, in fact, difficult to discover any point in Christian moral teaching that was new or unfamiliar. Christianity did not so much introduce a new morality as offer men an ability to keep the precepts they knew already. It gave morality a powerful sanction; it gave a new motive and it raised the standard; but scarcely in any respect did it lay down new precepts. Perhaps only in the case of chastity did it from the first set a far higher standard than the pagan world anticipated. Probably also, on the side of sympathy, consideration

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for the weak, and the universality of love, Christian teaching was an advance. Yet, after all, it was a question of degree; so far as moral teaching went, nothing was absolutely new.

II

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(*continued*)

ABOUT the time of our Lord's birth the traditional religion of the Græco-Roman world was seriously enfeebled. Many had become sceptical; a materialistic outlook prevailed; the temples of the gods were unfrequented, and were even falling into ruin. A long sanguinary war is usually followed by a reaction unfavourable to religion; and Rome had just emerged from the bath of blood which the dying struggles of the Republic brought upon her.

The Emperor Octavian, concerned about religion as about morals, strove by admonition and example, as by restoration and endowment of temples, to arrest the decay. By the middle of the first century the period of hard materialistic irreligion had largely passed; and it would be going beyond our evidence to assert that the decline of religion at any time was universal. The old paganism was far from having lost all its power. It showed itself capable of won-

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derful vitality and capacity for reform till the fourth century, and in some quarters much later.

Tenacious of life, however, as paganism was, it was being subjected to many influences which tended towards modification and advance. The very existence of the Empire, which united and blended so many diverse elements, contributed powerfully to render untenable and incredible what we may call the old parochial paganism in which every city-state and little country had its own peculiar deity or deities. In the pagan mind the god and the State were so closely associated that universal Empire suggested, if it did not even imply, a universal religion. With one supreme ruler over one political entity, a universal religion and a supreme God was a natural thought. The idea thus practically suggested had for long been fostered in the minds of thoughtful people from the side of speculation. Philosophers and the well educated might still speak of "the immortal gods," but it was largely a *façon de parler*. For a long time the old myths about the gods had been either set aside or interpreted allegorically. If monotheism was not definitely taught, it was trembling on the lips of the best thinkers.

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That an important part in the development and dissemination of such thoughts as the unity, the moral character, and the moral demands of deity among masses of the Græco-Roman world was played by the Jews of the Dispersion is as unquestionable as it is generally admitted, and needs no more than mention. While we speak of the Jews, however, we must not forget that an important change had occurred in the centre of gravity of their own religion. Prevented, as the great majority of the dispersed Jews were, from frequent visits to Jerusalem, the Temple, with priest and sacrifice, had given way to the Synagogue, where, with no sacrificial ritual, was held a simple service of prayer and praise, during which the Scriptures were read and their ethical and spiritual teaching expounded and enforced. Jewish influence throughout the Empire was very considerable. Jews had the ear of many Roman officials. The centurions of the Gospels and Acts are only examples of a great number in all ranks of life who were deeply influenced by the teaching and worship of the Synagogue.

But in the early Christian centuries there was another religious movement throughout the Empire

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that was of profound interest and importance in familiarising the world with nearly all the essential conceptions which characterised Christianity.

THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS

From Egypt and the East there passed into the Western world, partly before Christianity appeared and to a great extent contemporaneously with it, a series of religious movements which are known as the mystery religions.

They were associated with the names of ancient divinities, but in reality were new religions. Their origin is almost hopelessly obscure, and exceedingly few facts are ascertainable as to where and when they first appeared, when they spread to this or that particular region, and how long they survived in any particular place. They were probably at the height of their popularity in the second century, but they were influenced long before.

We are concerned only with the contribution they made to religious thought in the environment in which Christianity found itself. It will suffice

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to indicate the main features in which, broadly speaking, they resemble each other.

The mystery religions were marked by such characteristics as follow. They aimed at being universal, they were for all peoples and all classes; and in their religious assemblies all social distinctions vanished. They brought into the Græco-Roman religious world an element which was very weak in the traditional paganism—a profound sense of sin and a scheme of redemption. To a very great extent they displaced a sacrificial for a sacramental system; they had initiatory rites comparable to baptism and sacred meals of communion with the deity. They powerfully supported the tendency towards monotheism, holding that the many gods were either attributes of, or different names for, the one God. Several of them had myths of the God suffering and dying for His people, and of His resurrection, which was held to be either a symbol of the worshippers' rising into a new life or a pledge of their immortality. In the initiatory rite the believer was "born again," and his new life was nourished by the sacraments. They made an appeal to the emotions such as the traditional paganism did

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not. In contrast with the old city-state paganism, in which the chief magistrate was often chief priest, they had a special professional priesthood. They developed a technical religious terminology which is paralleled in the New Testament.

Their worst blemish was the great place they allowed to magical ideas and magical methods of securing salvation and fellowship with God. Redemption and the nourishment of the soul are magical rather than genuinely spiritual experiences and processes. If the Jews or anybody "required a sign," the mystery religions were ready and eager to give it. The priests made free use of ventriloquism and other trickery to give the believer any demonstration of God's presence and power that he desired.

MITHRAISM

It is worth while to say a few words about one of the mystery religions the spread of which was perhaps more phenomenal in its extent and rapidity than that of Christianity itself. Renan was exaggerating when he declared that, if it had not been for Christianity, Mithraism would probably have

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been the prevailing religion of western Europe; yet its wide diffusion and its tenacity of life were certainly very remarkable. It was, however, mainly, though not exclusively, strong in the army. It was the soldiers' religion, and its monuments are distributed along the line of the Roman military camps from the north of England to Egypt.

Mithra originally was a Persian god, and Mithraism started as sun-worship. When the movement came Westward, Mithra had ceased to be the sun and became the ally of the sun. He was set great tasks, and suffered much in performing them. The most important of those tasks was the capture of a great bull which he was ordered to keep captive in a cave. The bull escaped, Mithra pursued and slew him, and from the blood of the bull there sprang all living things.

The worshippers of Mithra assembled in caverns in memory of the cave, and on the walls were depicted scenes from the achievements of Mithra. The ritual was impressive, and was aided with music. There were sacraments comparable to baptism; and sacred meals of bread and water or bread and wine. This sacred meal was at once a commemoration of

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the Last Supper of Mithra and a communion with the god which strengthened the spiritual life of the believer. A curious coincidence was that on this sacred bread the figure of the Cross was imposed. A peculiar feature was the rite known as *Tauribolium*. The participant stood in a pit; a bull was slain on a platform above; and the blood ran over him. This was spiritually explained as cleansing from sin by shed blood. Its efficacy lasted for twenty years, and a second blood baptism made the participant "born again for eternity." A high morality was enjoined on the believers, the virtue of self-control being specially emphasised.

EMPEROR-WORSHIP

In the environment as we have considered it up to this point there existed many elements in line with Christianity. Christianity, as cannot be too often emphasised, transformed those favourable elements of pagan thought when it adopted them as its own or combined them with its own, but clearly they presented no obstacle to the new religion.

We have now, however, to consider an element in

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the environment which was directly counter to an essential feature of Christianity, and which was to prove a source of danger. That was the adoption by the Roman Government of Cæsar-worship as a religion for all, and as a means of testing the loyalty of all to Cæsar.

It may well seem strange that the hard-headed Romans could ever have seriously entertained the idea that the living Emperor was a divine being in whose honour temples should be built, a priesthood instituted, and a splendid ceremonialism practised. In truth, Rome adopted the idea with considerable hesitation. In the East it was not a new thing that the reigning sovereign should be deified, and it was in the East that Cæsar-worship originated. Julius Cæsar was honoured in his lifetime at Ephesus as "the god descended from Mars and Venus, who has appeared in human form," and "the universal saviour of the life of men." Much earlier than this, in 195 B.C., Smyrna instituted the worship of the Power of Rome. Hence it was not altogether a new thing if the East attributed divine prerogatives in profusion to the great Augustus.

It was by no means merely fulsome flattery that

was thereby expressed. A sincere sense of gratitude induced the East to confer on Cæsar the highest honours conceivable. Cæsar had done for them what their gods had failed to do—given them peace and security and so ensured their prosperity. An inscription in honour of the birthday of Augustus includes such statements as these: "All-ruling Providence has filled this man with such gifts for the salvation of the world as designate him the Saviour for us and for coming generations; of wars will he make an end, and establish all things worthily. By his appearing are the hopes of our forefathers fulfilled. The birthday of god has brought to the world glad tidings."

Nor was it only in the East that men had reason to be grateful for the rise of the Empire; so in the West itself extraordinary honours were conferred upon the Emperor. The Senate decreed that his birthplace was a holy place. The new name Augustus, borne by Octavian and his successors, implied from the first something of super-human dignity. Stories of portents and marvels at his birth grew rapidly with the years. As early as 14 A.D. the Emperor consented to accept worship from an

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Italian city, and the process, once begun, speedily spread, until at last the Government, perceiving the great practical utility of this Emperor-worship, not only allowed it, but enjoined it. The Jews alone were exempted.

SUPERSTITION

It has to be noted, too, that the Græco-Roman world into which Christianity came, and for long after its advent, was, on the whole, under the domination of magical and superstitious ideas. Of what we term natural causes there was little knowledge. From philosopher to peasant, nearly all believed in astrology and the operations of good or evil spirits. Belief in omens, and in the power of wise men to discern and interpret signs in the starry heavens or in the entrails of animals, was general. None thought of enquiring for any other cause of thunder, tempest, or earthquake, than the wrath of some supernatural power.

SUMMARY

However we may describe the world to which Christianity came, it is evident that it is quite false

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to say that either morally or spiritually it was dead. Cæsar did not look out upon a dying world, however often he has been alleged to do so. On the contrary, it was a very live and alert world, a world that was making in religion all kinds of experiment. It was not only the Athenians who were "uncommonly religious." The old traditional paganism still kept a hold of a multitude of the people. Judaism had attracted many; so had the mystery religions. Many were disposed towards a religious philosophy without much definite cult, with neither sacrifice nor sacrament. In the first two centuries many found Cæsar-worship adequate to their religious needs, and adopted it, not only as pledge of their gratitude and loyalty to the Empire, but with real religious fervour. Ideas drawn from a vast variety of sources met. Syncretisms took shape and dissolved again. Judaism had combined with Greek philosophy in Philo. Conceptions foreign to Greece and Rome had come in from Egypt, Asia, Persia, and probably India. It was an epoch of strange comminglings; only recent times have witnessed anything quite like it. In the eccentric and ephemeral combinations of Eastern and Western religious thought which have been

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tried in our own day, we have, in a small way, what existed on a much larger scale in the early Christian centuries.

III

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

THE relationships of the old faith and the new were very intimate. Jesus and all His first followers were Jews. It was some time before it became clear to any that Christianity was bound to break with Judaism. In the New Testament we have a revelation of how the breach took place, and an indication of the hostility of the adherents of the old faith to the Church.

Let us preface some remarks about the state of Judaism in the early days of the Gospel. The coherence of Judaism is surprising when we remember its deep fissures. Far back in its history there lay grounds of division. In the Old Testament we see clearly the co-existence of two opposed tendencies, which may be conveniently described as priestism and prophetism. On the one hand, there is a mass of legislation in God's name for sacrifice and elaborate ritual; on the other hand, a protest, also in God's name, against the over-evaluation, if not the

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existence, of such things. This broadly corresponds to another divergence of view, exclusiveness and universality. Is Israel to remain a peculiar people, or is she but a messenger to the world? Those who held closely to priestism were, on the whole, exclusivists; they who were more deeply influenced by prophetism were, on the whole, universalists. Apart from this divergence, which, profound as it was, did not create parties in any open dispute, there had been for a considerable time before our Lord's day a very sharp division between Pharisees and Sadducees. It is not easy to express briefly the precise difference between them. The Sadducees were perhaps more primarily concerned with political than with religious questions. They accepted the *fait accompli* of Roman jurisdiction. The Pharisees never ceased to fret against the Roman domination, although only a section, the Zealots, believed in active resistance. In religion the Sadducees held firmly by the written Law alone, the Pharisees by the written Law *plus* tradition. By this was meant not only a vast body of precepts derived from the original Law, but important additions to doctrine. They who feel reluctance to believe that Christianity owed anything

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to heathenism forget that the Judaism of the first century was itself largely tinged with views which cannot be historically explained save by foreign influence. Between the eschatology of the Jews in the time of Christ, and the vague, dubious views of the future in the Old Testament, a striking contrast is evident. Still more deeply affected by foreign influences were the Essenes—an ascetic, semi-monastic brotherhood.

Sadducees and Pharisees were at one on certain things. The authority of the written Law and the permanence of the Temple were articles of faith for both. It is, however, a complete misunderstanding to hold that all Jews were either Sadducees or Pharisees. The plain man, the *'amha-arets*, feared God and walked according to the Law, heeding little a dispute which no doubt seemed to him mainly a struggle as to which set leaders should have a majority in the Sanhedrin, or control of the Temple and its revenues.

Reference has already been made to the difference between the Palestinian Jews and the Diaspora. But if to the latter the Temple was shadowy, all the more important were the Law and the customs.

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Such differences among the Jews were important for Judaism itself, but, strange as it may seem, they did not to any great extent affect the attitude of Jews to Christianity. The attitude of Gamaliel was perhaps determined so far by the fact that the accusers were Sadducees, and on one memorable occasion St. Paul successfully played the one party against the other; but otherwise Christianity gained nothing from the existence of division among the Jews. The Church drew converts from all sections; She aroused the hostility of all. Just as Calvary was due to an agreement between Sadducees and Pharisees, so the Church united all sections against herself. Her opponents in the New Testament are simply "Jews."

IN JERUSALEM

It must be remembered that the Jews could openly persecute Christians to a very limited extent. However great their will might be, they lacked the power, Rome having taken from them the power of life and death. Why should the Jews desire to persecute? The earliest Christians were all devout Jews,

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zealous for the Law and the Temple. We must look at the cases of persecution individually.

As to the action taken against Peter and John (Acts iv.), we may suppose that one cause of the Jewish hostility was that jealous prejudice which an official or professional class always entertains against unauthorised teachers or practitioners; but on what pretext could this prejudice take action? The leaders of opposition in this case are Sadducees, whose great aim was to stand well with the Roman Government. Hence they took action, partly at least, because they feared a disturbance of the peace of the city. A crowd raised to enthusiasm in the very courts of the Temple was a possible menace to that peace. It must be remembered that the action of the Sadducees against Jesus was due to their fear of a revolutionary movement (John xi. 48). But we must notice another point in the charge, viz. that the Apostles are preaching Jesus, whom the Council had condemned. That menaced the authority of the Supreme Court among the people. The Council thus feared damage to its prestige from two quarters—the Government, for permitting tumultuous assemblies, and the populace, who might be led to

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make a hero and martyr of one whom the Council had sent to His death. As yet the Jews raised no charge of blasphemy against the Apostles; in fact, no indictable offence of any kind could be clearly made out. Hence on Gamaliel's advice the case is practically hushed up. The supposition advanced by some that some sort of understanding was arrived at between the Council and the Apostles so that the Apostles met the wishes of the Council by becoming more restrained in their propaganda seems very dubious. More probably the Council tacitly resolved to give no more publicity to the movement by taking official proceedings against it and then having to confess that they were baffled to deal with it. As yet there was nothing to be seriously alarmed about.

STEPHEN

Very different is the case of Stephen. The precise significance of Stephen for primitive Christianity is much disputed. Was he a pioneer ahead of the Apostles and a forerunner of St. Paul? Did he begin the breach between Church and Synagogue and the schism within the Church itself? Or does his speech

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set forth no more than what the Church of his day, still firmly embosomed in Judaism, generally held. Both views are arguable. Very probably Stephen did speak of the Temple in such a way as to lead to a dangerous misunderstanding of his views. We see that from the defence which he makes before the Council. His hearers might be pardoned if they understood him to mean that Solomon's building a house for God had been a blunder. The decisive thing, however, from the Jewish point of view was the blasphemy. "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." It was such blasphemy that had sent Jesus to the Cross.

As to the circumstances of the stoning of Stephen, opinions are divided. The Jews had no power to inflict such punishment. A crime worthy of death, according to their Law, had to be referred to the Procurator. Was Pilate's confirmation secured? If it was, it is somewhat strange that Luke makes no mention of it. If it was not, it is equally strange that no protest was made against what, legally considered, was a lynching. The question must remain obscure. It is not improbable that the whole inci-

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dent just illustrates what administration in the hands of Pilate had come to.

What happened to the Church in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen? St. Luke's statement, "They were all scattered abroad except the Apostles," presents a problem. Why should the Apostles have enjoyed an immunity not extended to their adherents? One is almost compelled to think that the views of Stephen were in advance of what the Apostles at this time were prepared to homologate.

Whether that be so or not, the persecution of Stephen marks a definite crisis in the relations of official Judaism to the Gospel. Henceforward Christians are suspect of blasphemy, speaking against the Temple, trying to change the customs, rebelling against the Council. And one young Rabbi determined that Christianity must be firmly suppressed. He was not content with driving the Stephen party from Jerusalem; his ambition was to pursue them into their most distant refuges and bring them to trial. The persecution was futile. The scattering of the Jerusalem community, so far from extinguishing the fire, only spread it farther; and, after Saul's persecuting zeal received its dramatic check,

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official Judaism went back to the position it held before Stephen's death, and the Church had peace.

This policy of letting the Christians alone was not really broken in the case of the persecution of James and Peter (Acts xii.). This was due to the intervention of Herod, and all agree it was an isolated occurrence. Yet it is to misunderstand the situation to hold that at any time on the part of official Judaism there was real toleration of the Christians. Herod's intervention pleased the Jews. We may take it that the will to persecute was not lacking. If toleration was there, it was due to impotence.

ST. PAUL

If the Jews were in some perplexity as to how to frame an indictment against the Church in Jerusalem whose leaders were all good Jews, zealous for the Law and not definitely opposed to the Temple, there was no such dubiety in their minds about the case of St. Paul. To the Jews he was clearly a renegade and a traitor. It is plain enough that Pauline Christianity has definitely broken with Judiasm. In a certain sense it is not anti-Jewish; in

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another it is. It recognises the value of the old dispensation, but only its historical significance and necessity, not its permanent validity. The Law was a preparation for the Gospel, our tutor to bring us to Christ; it cannot possibly be the final dispensation, for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. Whether St. Paul himself ever attained the clarity of view which we find in the Epistle to the Hebrews is uncertain, but beyond question that Epistle merely carries St. Paul's views to their inevitable conclusion.

Hence we can understand that from the viewpoint of orthodox Judaism, convinced that Law and Temple were for all time, St. Paul was not merely not a good Jew, but one who had discarded all that made him a Jew in any sense save racially. If we try to think ourselves into the Jewish standpoint we can see that the charges against Paul put forth by the Jews of Asia are not baseless, nor trivial, nor inspired only by malice, so far as they deal with "Teaching all men everywhere against the people, and the Law and this place [the Temple]" (Acts xxi. and xxiv.).

When, through the intervention of Lysias, who

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saved the Apostle from lynching, the case passed definitely before a Roman court, the indictment had to be revised, and was revised with considerable skill. The real charges are still what they were, but are so phrased as to represent danger to Judaism as a danger to the State. St. Paul is an agitator (pestilent fellow), who teaches sedition among the Jews and has profaned the Temple. Those three points were all such as constituted a grave charge in a Roman court sitting at Jerusalem. The first two are designedly ambiguous. Was it the sort of agitator and a sort of sedition which really affected the public peace, or were they such as Gallio refused to take cognisance of? Was the Apostle a menace to the peace of the Emperor or merely the occasion of a split among the Jews? Circumstances kept the case from ever being fought out in Palestine, and it is useless to speculate as to what might have happened had St. Paul not appealed to Cæsar.

JAMES

The incident in which the Jews appear at their worst is the murder of James, the brother of the

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Lord. No one could allege that he was not a good Jew. According to Hegesippus, "To him alone it was permitted to enter the holy place; and alone he entered into the sanctuary, and was found on his knees asking forgiveness on behalf of the people, so that his knees became hard like a camel's, for he was continually bending the knee in worship to God, and asking forgiveness for the people. In fact, on account of his exceeding great righteousness he was called the Just." In the year 62 A.D., advantage was taken of the absence of a Roman Procurator to strike a blow at the Church in Jerusalem over which James presided. Ananus, the High Priest, accused James and others before the Council on a charge of breaking the Law, and secured a condemnation. What Ananus really desired was probably to do something to repress a popular ferment in Jerusalem at the time, to which the teaching of Jesus as Messiah seemed to contribute. The conflicting accounts of the mode of the death of James cannot be reconciled. The martyrdom created a sensation of horror among the Jews, some of whom saw in the siege and capture of the city by Titus God's vengeance for the misdeed.

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These are all the cases of actual persecution recorded until, by the loss of what independence they had, the Jews lost all power to persecute. Whatever desire the Jews may have had to persecute, they were restrained by fear of popular tumult, which would have been dangerous to their independence. At first they were disposed to take action against the preachers of the Gospel because of fear that their preaching would cause popular disturbance; they soon came to see that drastic interference with the Apostles was likely to cause that very disturbance which they were anxious to avoid. Hence they were compelled, probably with reluctance, to tolerate Christianity of the kind which remained faithful to the Law and the Temple. Against Christianity, however, which criticised Law, Temple, or custom, the Jewish authorities did not hesitate to act, and in taking such action they could command popular support.

OUTSIDE PALESTINE

Any reader of the Acts of the Apostles observes that among the Jews of the Dispersion Christianity

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found some of its best friends and some of its bitterest enemies. Christian evangelists began their campaign in the Synagogue. St. Paul's aim was to offer the Gospel to the Jew first; and from the Synagogue many converts were won. On the other hand, for a variety of reasons many of the Jews were hostile. The Jews of the Dispersion had at once more reason for entertaining hostility to Christianity and greater facilities for showing it than those of Palestine. It was outside the Holy Land that the independence of the new religion became manifest. As taught by St. Paul, Christianity seemed to a rigid Jew to threaten the destruction of nearly everything that was characteristic of his religion. It seems paradoxical to say that outside Palestine the Jews had larger facilities for persecuting. Were they not a small proportion of the inhabitants of the cities, often despised and unpopular? What means had they of persecuting anybody? A very important difference between their position and that of their Palestinian brethren must be borne in mind. In the heathen world the Jews had no official responsibility for the preservation of the public peace; the Jews of Palestine had. Wherever tumultuous as-

semblies or mob-uproar occurred, Rome laid a heavy hand upon the responsible city officials. For public disorder in Jerusalem the Jews would be taken to account; not so in a heathen city, where, if the Jews contrived to conceal their real part cunningly enough, they might not even be suspected of complicity. The public authorities would have to answer for the disorder, not they. The rousing of mob violence against Christians was therefore vastly easier outside Palestine than in it; and we learn from Acts and the Epistles how often St. Paul had to flee from it, finding refuge sometimes in prison. The Roman power, on the whole, was exerted to protect Christians from the mob-frenzy instigated by the Jews. The Jews made one attempt to bring magisterial action against the Apostles, but it ended disastrously for them in a fiasco (Acts xviii. 12-17). The significance of Gallio's decision, we may be sure, would not escape the attention of the Jews. It rested on a belief that Christians were a Jewish sect. Gallio viewed the case as nothing but a legal-theological dispute among Jews, and on that ground refused to consider it. Very well, the Jews must

make it clear, so that no one could similarly err, that Christians were not Jews, that the Church was not a variety of the Synagogue, that Christianity was not Judaism but something new and dangerous. That the Jews played no insignificant part in paving the way for the Roman persecution of Christianity cannot be doubted. Their power was not limited to stirring up lewd fellows of the baser sort to violence against Apostles. They were influential in many quarters throughout the Empire. They had the ear of some highly placed in the State. They had at least one friend at Court; Poppæa, the consort of Nero, was very friendly disposed toward them, and, like many profligates, she was inclined to make up for moral delinquency by an external zeal for religion.

Thus the Jewish persecution, comparatively brief as was its duration in time, hampered and restricted as it was in itself, had far-reaching consequences. The Roman persecution was probably inevitable even had the Jews played no part in originating it; but historically that Jewish part was of very real importance.

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THE JUDAISTIC CONTROVERSY

As has just been indicated, there were at an early period two kinds of Christianity which differed in their attitude to the Jewish Law and Temple. The propaganda among the Gentiles made this almost inevitable. The primitive Christians never dreamt that Christianity involved any kind of breach with the faith of the fathers. To them it only meant that the dearest hopes of their people were realised. In various ways, as we have recorded in Acts, the Christian message was addressed to Gentile hearers. This fact of itself involved the question, Should the Gentile believers keep the Jewish Law in all its fulness? Consideration of this along with deep reflection on the life, and especially the Death, of Christ led St. Paul to his views of freedom from what he now regarded as the "bondage" of the Law. The Jewish Christians, however, were not all prepared to follow St. Paul. If we try to take their standpoint we shall be able to understand their hesitancy. They had been brought up in the belief that the Law was the express command of God, and how was it thinkable that God should change

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His mind? Further, it must be admitted that there was not much clear guidance from Jesus on this point. There were preserved reminiscences of His sayings on the subject from which contradictory conclusions might be drawn. Thus He had drawn a sharp distinction between the Law of God and the traditions of men, and had not hesitated to criticise some precepts of the Law itself. On the other hand, He had said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law; till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the Law till all things be accomplished. Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 17-20). Similarly, His attitude to the Temple was such that one might be honestly perplexed. He had indicated that the specially sacred character of the Temple site would pass and that the Temple itself would become a ruin, yet He frequented the Temple and cleansed it.

We can thus understand the perplexity in the minds of Jewish Christians. The perplexity issued in a definite cleavage of opinion. Unauthorised

visitors from Jerusalem taught the Galatians that they ought to be circumcised and keep the Law. St. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians to counteract the mischief which was thus wrought. That epistle reveals how widespread was the damage, and St. Paul's conviction that this Judaising is fatal to vital Christianity. From the Acts we should not gather that a very serious crisis had arisen. According to that account, there had been Judaistic teaching. A Council was held in Jerusalem to consider the matter; a unanimous decision was speedily reached which was everywhere received with thanksgiving. Of St. Luke's minimising the fierceness of controversy various explanations have been offered. In all probability St. Luke felt that the greatest restraint in referring to the subject was necessary. The fires of conflict had died down, but the ashes were still hot. The decision of the Council cannot but strike us as curious, both for its contents and its omissions. Precepts are enjoined on Gentile believers the permanent value of which is neither uniform nor obvious. Further, the decree of the Council does not go to the heart of the matter. It contemplates, if

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it does not suggest, that there are to be two Christian Churches—the Jewish in which the Law is to be observed; the Gentile, in which it is not. That such a state of things met St. Paul's views, or was likely to prove practicable for any length of time, is not probable. The question ceased to be of importance as the Christian Church became overwhelmingly Gentile in composition.

The view of Baur that on this question St. Peter and St. Paul were sharply opposed now finds no support. There was one occasion when St. Paul had to rebuke St. Peter sharply for withdrawing himself from fellowship with Gentile believers, but, apart from that, there is no evidence of any divergence between them. It is highly significant that it is St. Peter who is the first who has to explain to his brethren his baptism of a Gentile and his fellowship with him; and the first Epistle of Peter is steeped in Paulinism. Different, however, is probably the case as it stands between St. Paul and the Jerusalem Church headed by St. James. They are greatly disturbed by the rumours they have heard that St. Paul is teaching disrespect to the Law and extending to Jewish converts the freedom from the

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Law allowed to Gentiles (Acts xxi. 21). They give the impression that they regard such rumours as slanders which surely cannot be true. It will be best, they advise, that St. Paul do something publicly to show that the rumours are baseless, that he walks orderly and keeps the Law. This well-meant advice was acted on by St. Paul to his own undoing. It is clear, then, that James and the elders in Jerusalem stay by a compromise which could not possibly serve for any length of time—Gentile Christians are emancipated from the Law which Jewish Christians have to excel in keeping. Only a very pious but illogical mind could believe that that could be final truth; only a mind that had failed to grasp the real inwardness of the Gospel as St. Peter and St. Paul perceived it. Such a mind apparently was that of James, and the Epistle that bears his name contains none of the essence of the Gospel at all.

After the fall of Jerusalem the two sections of the Church, Jewish and Gentile, were apparently gradually fused into unanimity on the topic that had divided them. The fusion, however, was not complete. For centuries there lingered groups who held to the old conservative position of primitive

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Jewish Christianity. Such relics go under the name of Ebionites.

EBIONITES

Ebionism is best understood in the way indicated—a relic of the utmost conservative, primitive Jewish Christianity. The meaning of the name has been disputed. Some ancient writers held that they were the adherents of a certain leader Ebion, but, with all respect to Hilgenfeld, this is a misunderstanding. The word Ebionites means “the poor;” and early writers suggest that the name Ebionite expresses their poverty of intellect or their poor theology. In all probability the term was one of the ancient names by which the Christians of Jerusalem were known. It was, likely, a name in which the Ebionites gloried; it marked them as the successors of those who had laid all their possessions at the Apostles’ feet.

The Ebionites rejected the authority of St. Paul, and refused fellowship with Gentile believers unless they were circumcised and obedient to the whole Law. Jesus, they held, was a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, upon whom the Holy Spirit descended at Baptism. His cross was an offence to

them. Other Ebionites held those views with a strong tincture of Gnostic elements which they may have derived from the syncretistic Essenes.

Different from the Ebionites were the Nazarenes, who accepted St. Paul, and, while regarding the Law as binding on themselves, did not expect such obedience from Gentile converts with whom they held fellowship. They believed, too, in our Lord's miraculous Birth. It is obvious that we may regard Nazarenes as Jewish Christians who accepted, but did not advance beyond, the compromise reached at Jerusalem. As to the Ebionites there is far less agreement. It may be suggested that they are Jewish believers who not only did not accept the decision of Jerusalem, but had not reached the views of Christ and His Death which the Church had attained between the Resurrection and Pentecost. Their beliefs are just such as many friendly contemporaries of Jesus, outside the intimate circle of disciples, would naturally entertain. The Ebionites, on this view, are they who stood fast by a very primitive position of attachment to Jesus, and refused to make any advance. The surprising fact about them is their long continuance; they were

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fairly widespread, and were known as late as the fourth century.

ANTI-JUDAISM AND REACTION

Down to the time of the revolt of Bar-Cochba (132 A.D.) more or less amicable relations were maintained in some quarters between Christians and liberal Jews. From that date, however, the two religions drew more and more decidedly apart. Already, indeed, in the New Testament, in St. John and the Pastoral Epistles, we find a certain acerbity appearing in the way in which reference is made to the Jews. In Ignatius the break with Judaism is complete. To Judaize is to apostatise. The Sabbath is not for Christians. Other Christian writers emphasise that, though they keep the Lord's Day, they are far from wishing to sabbatise. On the Jewish side too, the liberal tendency was more and more suppressed. What it stood for survived only in the Christian Church. Christian Anti-Judaism was carried to an extreme, as we shall see, by many of the Gnostics, and particularly Marcion. In consequence, the pendulum swung back in the opposite

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direction, and, in the transformation of Christianity which took place in the third century, Jewish influences won a victory which overshadows the defeat of the Judaisers who troubled St. Paul.

The spirit of too many Christians for many centuries has been overmuch that of the Old Testament rather than that of the Gospel.

IV

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN STATE

FROM the days of Nero (A.D. 64) to the reign of Constantine (A.D. 313), the profession of Christianity exposed one to serious danger. Throughout that period Christians were a persecuted people. Not that actual sufferings were constantly being borne; there were intervals of peace some of which lasted for a generation or more. Persecution might be general, or it might be local; it might be fierce or mild; but throughout two centuries and a half the position of Christians was insecure. Their legal position was never in doubt; whether they were actually made to suffer or not depended not on the Law, but on the attitude of the Emperor or local magistrates who administered the Law.

Different explanations as to why the Roman State should have persecuted Christianity have been given, and unanimity on the subject has not been attained. It is rather curious that the early writers who defended Christianity and sought to influence the

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Government in their favour seemed to be themselves perplexed as to why they were persecuted; and, on the other hand, the heathen writers who attacked Christianity do not set forth the grounds on which the State was persecuting. The best we can do is to consider the religious policy and legislation of Rome.

ROMAN RELIGIOUS POLICY

In practice Rome was wonderfully tolerant of religions. As we have seen, a great variety of religious bodies were busy in the first centuries propagating their views and winning adherents, and men crossed freely without interference from one to another. This was really more than strict Law would have allowed. Rome did not interfere in general with the religions of conquered peoples, but the Law did not give them permission to become propagandists of their Faith. In strictness of Law a man was free to practise the religion to which he had been born; he was not free either to change his religion or to attempt to persuade other people to change theirs. In practice, however, Rome very prudently did not insist on the strict letter of its

own religious Law. The principle of Roman administration, here as in many other things, was not rigid enforcement of the Law, but an enlightened expediency. Thus, while propagandism and change of religion were technically illegal, in practice Rome ignored them, provided that some very important conditions were observed. The problem of the religions of the Empire was in some respects similar to that before the British Government in India, and the practice followed was similar. No government, ancient or modern, can ignore religious rites which threaten public order or public morality or the public safety. Thus in India religious processions may have to be forbidden as a menace to the public peace, and some rites have had to be forbidden by Law as outrages on decency or humanity. Similarly, if the public peace or public morality or the safety of the State seemed to be menaced by any religion, then Rome interfered with strong hand. It is not correct to say that Christianity was the only religion with which Rome interfered. Probably because of their turbulence, the Jews were sometimes penalised. As an offence against civilisation, the more savage rites of Celtic religion were

prohibited. Some of the mystery religions were regarded with grave suspicion, and, probably because of the fierce excitement aroused, one was prohibited within a certain radius of Rome. We may take it then, that Rome persecuted on intelligible grounds any religion adjudged contrary to public order, decency, or the safety of the State.

But Christianity was in direct opposition to the Law as soon as it was realised that it was a new religion. To get liberty to exercise their religion, the adherents of any cult had to have their religion expressly recognised by the Senate. That recognition made them *religiones licitæ*. The Jewish religion was *religio licita*, and because of that the Jews were exempt from Cæsar-worship, which would have contradicted the very essence of their religion. Christianity was not *religio licita*. It may be questioned if this fact alone would have involved it in real trouble, yet the circumstance that it was not *religio licita* weighted the scales heavily against it. One who professed himself a Christian immediately stepped outside the protection of Roman Law into an atmosphere of insecurity and grave suspicion.

This circumstance has been exaggerated by many

writers who maintain that Christians were "out-laws," and that the profession of Christianity was a capital crime. They have held that while at first Christians were persecuted, not for their religion alone, but for some particular crime alleged, very soon no charge was needed save that of Christianity. To my mind that is not accurate. It is true that in a sense Christians were persecuted "for the name," but the name "Christian" was never an empty name; it imported far more than mere adherence to a non-licit religion. An accused Christian could clear himself if he were recreant to his Faith, not by simple denial that he was a Christian, but by doing a certain thing which proved that he was not guilty of the offence which the name "Christian" connoted. The connotation of Christian to the magistrate no doubt varied as time went on, but in no case was it a mere name that Rome persecuted. However often it has been asserted, it has never been proved that Roman magistrates required no more than a pleading guilty of being a Christian to send an accused Christian to death.

The fact, however, that Christianity was *religio non-licita* is of great importance. For the first

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quarter of a century of its existence Christians enjoyed the protection of Roman magistrates and Roman Law, as we see illustrated in Acts. That was due to a mistake that the magistrates harboured. They regarded Christians as a sect of the Jews whose religion was *licita*, and they would not allow one sect of the Jews to lay violent hands on another. As soon as Rome saw that Christians were not Jews, a dramatic change in the outward fortunes of Christianity took place. In the light of that new knowledge, magistrates had to reconsider whether precedents such as that set by Gallio could be safely followed, or whether the Jewish accusers whom he non-suited were not right after all. That in bringing this new light to the Roman authorities the Jews played a considerable part cannot be doubted.

CHARGES AGAINST CHRISTIANS

Why did the Roman authority, which in general stood for such fair dealing, persecute and condemn and punish Christians? What crimes were laid to the charge of Christians? Behind all magisterial action lay the widespread intense dislike of Chris-

tians by their heathen neighbours. "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake" was very literally fulfilled. Christians were disliked on account of their intolerance. They maintained that they alone had the truth, that all other religions were false. They were disliked for their unsociability. Where every ordinary activity in life was associated with some idolatrous act, Christians found few opportunities for any kind of intercourse with their pagan neighbours. Their scruples against all association with idolatry made them a "new race," a race apart. Christians were much perplexed among themselves on the subject. St. Paul deals with the problem of a Christian being invited to a feast in the house of a heathen, and his advice, wise as it is, scarcely solves the obvious difficulties. A feast among pagans was very often a sort of communion with their deity. "You are invited to the Table of the Lord Serapis" was a common form of invitation in Egypt. Nearly every meal began with an offering to a god, and much of the food that came to the table had been in some sense sacrificed to an idol. The difficulty was very great, and the stricter among the Christians on conscientious grounds had to ab-

stain from nearly all the common amenities of social life. Further, they were intensely disliked by the vested interests that the spread of their religion threatened. A great number of people owed their livelihood to the worship of the gods, and we see an example in Acts xix. 24, of how people injured in this way were tempted to retaliate. Lastly, the joyous hope of the Christian of a speedy end of the world increased the popular suspicion of the Christians' loyalty to the Empire. All this popular dislike of Christians was an element in the mind of any magistrate who had to deal with Christians.

Against Christians, moreover, what strike us as astounding charges were levelled—atheism, sorcery, cannibalism, gross sexual vice. That such charges were seriously made and had serious consequences is proved by the pains with which the Apologists labour to show their baselessness. It is not difficult to comprehend how the charges were made plausible. As to atheism, a religion without images, or sacrifices, or temples, or priest's vestments, might easily seem to be no religion at all to people who could perform no ordinary duty of life without acknowledging some god by some definite rite. Athe-

ism, however, came later to mean, not absolute godlessness, but enmity to the gods. Every disaster or misfortune that befell—flood, famine, earthquake, and the like—was attributed to the wrath of the gods whom Christians not only neglected to worship, but were fiercely denouncing.

The charge of sorcery is a familiar one in all ages. If every other charge broke down, there was always sorcery to fall back on, and the miracles claimed by Christians for Christ and His Apostles were to the heathen proofs of it. The charge of cannibalism, or human sacrifice, was one which the Jews had had to face. It is easier to understand the charge against Christians, who spoke of a rite in which they ate flesh and drank blood.

The charges of grave sexual disorder are met by Tertullian by retorting that the pagans were attributing to Christians their own misdemeanours; and many like Dr. Workman hold that the charges revealed chiefly the impure hearts of the accusers. Could anything even of a plausible distortion lie at their base? Something doubtless may be found in the rather unfortunate customs of the early Christians, who held meetings at night, met for a "love-

feast," and greeted one another with a kiss. Possibly such things gave slander its start. It must be admitted, too, that we have evidence in the New Testament itself that very unseemly proceedings marred the love-feast, and that from a very early date there were antinomian heretics. The heathen can hardly be blamed for not distinguishing carefully between normal Christians and heretics, and the failings of the one were attributed to all. With regard even to the most baseless charges, evidence of the truth of any of them might be easily found, for examination of an accused person included torture, and under torture some victims would admit anything.

Such charges, however successful they might be in individual cases, ceased to be the main charge against Christians. The efforts of the Apologists in denying their truth, and the evidence as to the kind of moral life that Christians were living, were not fruitless; and, at latest, from the close of the second century such charges are not repeated. Celsus has much sharp criticism of Christians, but he makes no such charges as those.

Of crucial importance was another kind of charge

—danger to the State. It must be admitted that on this ground there was for the legal mind a clear case against Christianity. Christianity was a revolutionary force in the Empire. The crime charged against Christians was *Odium Generis Humani*. In the popular mind, that meant probably the kind of unsociability to which we have referred. To the legal mind, however, it meant something far more serious—hatred of civilisation, enmity to the State, anarchism. The new religion threatened an end of the established order. In vain did Apologists tell how Christians prayed for Cæsar and the welfare of the Empire; in vain did they protest that Cæsar was persecuting his best subjects; they failed altogether to show that Christianity was not fundamentally revolutionary. They do not seem to have realised themselves how revolutionary it was. They believed that Christianity would be the best cement of the Empire; they do not seem to have seen that it was rather likely to act as an explosive in the social fabric. To the Christian Apologist it seemed easy to hold that a man could be a loyal member of two kingdoms at once. To the Roman mind this was an impossibility. In so far as a man owed

allegiance to another King he could not be loyal to Cæsar. What Cæsar required was absolute loyalty. We who have grown up with the notion of the two Kingdoms almost in our blood, need resolutely to try to gain the ancient Roman viewpoint if we are to do justice to the situation. Even in our own day there remains the possibility of a conflict between the two loyalties. Church and State have often been in conflict; so have conscience and Law. If that be so after so many centuries of Christianity, we can recognise how very real the difficulty must have appeared to Roman minds. With many a desire to be merciful towards Christians, they were firmly persuaded that this idea of a double allegiance, with Christian principle determining the limits of a man's loyalty to Cæsar, made Christians a menace to the safety of the State. Herein lies the fundamental cause of conflict between the Church and the Empire, of itself sufficient to explain persecution. The general case was probably greatly strengthened by some particular aspects in which the new religion seemed likely to threaten to be a disruptive influence in the State and in the social order. Thus every Government has cause to fear

a movement which affects the loyalty of the Army, and Christianity seemed to do this inasmuch as Christian officers were conscientiously unable to perform certain rites which formed part of their duty; and, further, many Christian teachers held that soldiering was no occupation for a Christian. Again, in the Roman social system the compact unit was the *familia*, and anything that threatened its solidarity seemed to strike a blow at the very foundations of society. That Christianity exercised a disruptive influence in the *familia* is undoubted. Jesus foresaw it. Christianity set members of the *familia* at variance, and threatened the old fundamental *patria potestas*.

Thus the fundamental or final charge on which Christians were condemned was that of anarchism. If an accused Christian denied that he was a revolutionary, the matter was easily settled. Will he sacrifice to the genius of Cæsar? No. Then he is guilty of *majestas*—treason—and the punishment is usually death. For condemned Christians who were Roman citizens, death was by the recognised form of legal execution. For them who had not the franchise, death was often preceded by fiendish tortures

and shameful indignities. The anniversaries of Cæsar's birthday were often marked by special outbursts of persecution; and the execution of condemned Christians became spectacles for the multitude. Perhaps almost accidentally, some frivolous mind devised a new form of entertainment, and "The Christians to the lions!" became a popular cry.

It is thus clear that no special legislation was required under which police action against Christians might be taken. The police had only to act on the Law as it long had been, and the legal position that all except Jews should attest their loyalty by Cæsar-worship. The situation has been confused to many minds by the fortuitous circumstance that it was an Emperor—Nero—who was personally responsible for the first Roman persecution of Christians. The significant fact has been strangely overlooked that he did not take action against them because their religion was *non-licita*, and that therefore they were "outlaws," guilty of a capital offence, but because he accused them of incendiarism. The historian Tacitus, writing long after the event, regards Christianity as a detestable superstition, but he has not a syllable to show that in his opinion

Christians should have been persecuted as outlaws, not incendiaries. The old legislation against new religions, we may take it, was somewhat like some of our ancient unrepealed statutes which are seldom or never acted upon. So far as reports of actual trials go, it is difficult to see that Christians were generally condemned as "outlaws."

Till the third century, it seems clear, action against Christians was what we would term ordinary police action. Emperors might and did modify it, sometimes in the favour of Christians, as Trajan and Hadrian did; sometimes tightening it up, as Marcus Aurelius did; and Cæsar, of course, was directly concerned in the case of Christian Roman citizens who were sent for trial to Rome.

Till well into the third century there was nothing like general persecution. It was local and sporadic; now here, now there; in some places, so far as we are aware, almost unknown. Christians had no security from the possibility of persecution, but a good deal of immunity from the actuality of it. Statements such as "Persecution raged from Gaul to Asia" in the second century are quite misleading, if they convey, as they seem meant to do, that the soil

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of the whole Empire was dyed with Christian blood. Nothing like that occurred. The definite statement of Origen that up to his time martyrdoms had been few and far between has often been explained away; but, allowing that there were persecutions of which he was ignorant, his statement must be allowed to prove at least the pictures of hecatombs of Christians is grossly exaggerated.

THE GENERAL PERSECUTIONS

From the beginning of the third century a distinct change is observable. Cæsar is now much more of an autocrat, and action against Christians is strictly regulated by Imperial Edicts. The first of these was issued (202 A.D.) by Septimius Severus, who forbade Jews and Christians to proselytise. There was no continuity, however, in Imperial policy. Cæsar sometimes favours Christians largely because his predecessor persecuted, and *vice versa*. Cæsar is often too much preoccupied with other concerns to take any notice of Christianity at all. The persecuting Emperors from now on to the end of persecution are evidently moved with genuine concern

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for the maintenance of paganism, or at least the averting of the wrath of the neglected gods. All the old charges against Christians except that of atheism, in the sense of hostility to the gods, have now disappeared.

DECIUS AND VALERIAN

The first general persecution broke out under Decius in 250 A.D. The Empire was in a depressed and dangerous state. Various calamities had befallen; the population was seriously reduced; misery was widespread. This calamitous state of matters inflamed the populace against Christians, whose "atheism" was held responsible. Decius probably feared the growing power of the Church as a compact organisation within the State. All governors were ordered to search out those who refused the national worship. For non-compliance therewith the lightest penalties were banishment and confiscation of property. Prolonged torture was a common experience. The Bishops were the first to be attacked.

After a respite, persecution was renewed with

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increased fierceness by Valerian in 257 A.D., when an Edict banished the clergy, prohibited the meeting of Christian congregations, and excluded Christians from their cemeteries. Next year it was enacted that all clergy should be summarily punished, rich and noble Christians fined and degraded, and, if still recalcitrant, executed.

It is obvious that Decius and Valerian aimed, not at wholesale massacre of Christians, but at destroying Christianity by breaking up its organisation in the Church.

THE EDICT OF GALLIENUS AND THE LONG PEACE

Gallienus, son and successor of Valerian, probably realising that persecution of Christians was neither causing the public calamities to cease nor destroying Christianity, resolved on a policy of toleration. His Edict of 259 A.D. grants to Christians permission of assembly and restores their confiscated property. This comes short of recognising Christianity as *religio licita*. It seems to amount only to a *nolle prosequi*. Whatever its precise legal significance, it ensured peace for the Church, a peace which lasted

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for half a century. The strong Aurelian (270-275 A.D.) intended to persecute, but died ere his plans could be carried out.

During the long peace the progress of Christianity was rapid and extensive. The Church increased in wealth and social prestige. Christianity covered the Empire and extended widely beyond its frontiers. As an institution the Church was almost as imposing as the Empire itself. The number of its members cannot be determined. It was not equally strong everywhere. At the opening of the fourth century it is doubtful if Christians were in a majority in any large city; we may be sure that they were in a minority in every province. The influence of Christianity, however, is never measurable by statistics of Church membership. Christian ideas were effective even among the critics of Christianity, and were widely influential everywhere. Even paganism, as we shall note later, had to copy the Church, in hopes thereby of reviving and saving itself. The policy of all the Emperors and statesmen of the early fourth century, those who persecuted and those who favoured the Church alike, is testimony to their appreciation of the Church's strength and influence.

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Christianity, they might hold, ought to be suppressed, or it ought to be fostered; in no case could it be ignored.

About the year 300 A.D. probably no Christian dreamed that the State would again persecute. Yet in the first years of the fourth century there was proceeding a marshalling of forces for the last decisive conflict. The State, at any rate, was preparing for a fight to a finish.

THE SECOND GREAT PERSECUTION

For the first twenty years of Diocletian's reign the peace was unbroken. The political situation was of great importance for the events that were coming, and must be briefly referred to. Diocletian had strengthened the Empire immensely, and, to conserve its strength, fell on a plan which was at first successful and then proved a weakness. He divided, not the territory of the Empire, but the supreme power, first between two, and a little later among four—an Augustus of the West and an Augustus of the East, with, as heir-apparent, a Cæsar to each. Cæsar, we may say, resolved himself into

a committee of four. For administrative purposes it was an excellent plan. The affairs of the vast Empire were beyond the management of one autocratic mind. Yet, human nature being what it is, one might guess what was likely to happen. The dream of being sole autocrat might influence the ambitions of any of the four, apart from the probability of rival candidatures for the Cæsarships. That was exactly what was to happen; into details we need not enter; they will be found in any History.

The storm of persecution broke on the Church in a series of Edicts from 303 to 309 A.D. It was the aim of Diocletian, as it had been that of Decius, to avoid bloodshed, but the Western Augustus, Maximian, went far beyond what in all probability Diocletian desired. The latter was content with ordering Scriptures to be burned, churches destroyed, and clergy imprisoned. The former enacted such measures as made martyrdom inevitable. For details of the persecution we must refer the reader to any of the Church Histories. Suffice it for us to say that the persecution fell very unequally upon different provinces. In the West it was scarcely

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felt at all; it was most violent and of longest duration in the East, under Galerius and Maximin Daia. What is of special interest to us is the cause of this outbreak, and the reasons for its failure.

CAUSES OF THE PERSECUTION

On the Christians who suffered, the great persecution came like a bolt from the blue, and explanation of it is not easily given. Why did Diocletian, who reigned over Christians for twenty years without molesting them, suddenly hurl all the power of the State against them?

Various explanations have been given—the influence of the convinced pagan Galerius; the influence of soothsayers after a failure of the *haruspex* to get an omen; the fires in the Imperial Palace at Nicomedia; and so on. All such things perhaps contributed, but as a full explanation they cannot but appear quite inadequate. We may take it that at bottom the cause of Diocletian's persecution is the old problem of the two kingdoms *versus* the unquestioned supremacy of Cæsar. By the fourth century, as we have indicated, the Church was com-

parable to a State within the State; it was far more compact than the State. In any city the population was divided. One section looked to the civil magistrate for guidance, and entrusted discipline of the unruly to him. Another section looked to the Bishop. The Bishop enthroned in the apse of the *basilica*, ruling his flock, was startlingly like the Prætor. Nay, more; there were Christians in high civil positions and they were governed, not only by Cæsar, but by the Bishop. Throughout the Empire that state of things existed. Here was a large, powerful body more united than any other body, so far apparently rendering willing obedience to Cæsar but yet owning a higher authority than his. If we try to think ourselves into the attitude of an old-fashioned Roman statesman, we shall admit that from his point of view the position was almost intolerable. This body of Christians had no legal right to exist and yet was a powerful State within the State. It must have been obvious to any thoughtful man that such a condition of things could not endure; the Church demanded serious attention. Things had come to such a pass that either the Church must be suppressed, or the State must come

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to terms with it. So what we see in the ten years' struggle is the first alternative being tried out. The matters referred to at the opening of this paragraph were only sparks which ignited a train that had been accumulating in Diocletian's mind. It is a fact of the highest significance that it was the strong Cæsars, the real statesmen of the third and fourth centuries who tried to suppress the Church. They saw quite clearly that Cæsar must destroy the Church or himself become a Christian.

THE FAILURE OF THE PERSECUTION

The persecuting policy was a complete failure. For that, several reasons may be suggested.

As Gwatkin says, it was wrecked on the conscience of the pagan world itself. A Christian to the lions now and then was one thing; this hunting and harassing and perhaps killing of the good neighbours beside whom one had lived in amity for years was quite another thing, against which they rebelled. As the persecution went on, fugitive Christians received shelter in pagan homes.

Again, Cæsar's police-officers differed greatly in

the measure of diligence with which they carried out his orders. Some, for instance, made strenuous quest for the prohibited Scriptures; others contented themselves with some such question as this: "You have not any bad books, have you?" Some did not examine too carefully as to whether it was the Scriptures or some quite different literature that was handed over for destruction.

Again, the persecution came far too late. It was too late even in the time of Decius; by Diocletian's time it was hopeless. Christians were far too numerous; it would have been neither practicable nor politic to exterminate them, and, though Diocletian never aimed at exterminating them, that was the only way by which the Church could have been destroyed.

Further, we have indicated that in the game of rival aspirants to Imperial power, continuity of policy was unlikely. Christians were so important an element by numbers and influence that an aspirant might make his attitude towards them a rung in the ladder by which he hoped to rise to power. The wavering attitude of Licinius on the Christian question is a case in point. He was prepared now to favour them, now to persecute them, which just

means that he was casting about now for the support of the Christians, now for that of the pagans.

Constantine saw the futility of persecution, and resolved to try the other alternative. He had, we take it, nobler grounds for favouring Christianity than personal ambition which used Christian support as a stepping-stone. He believed that the Christian religion might well prove that cement which the tottering Empire so sadly needed. Diocletian and Constantine were both aiming at the same thing—the consolidation, nay, the continued existence, of the Empire. There were only two lines of hope, one in destroying the Church, the other in coming to terms with it. Diocletian tried the former, and it had completely failed; Constantine followed the other. We are not denying that Constantine came to be sincerely persuaded of the truth of Christianity; but there is no evidence that he was in any sense a Christian when he defeated Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, and marched on Rome with the Cross displacing the eagles on his standards.

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EDICTS OF TOLERATION

In 311 A.D., Galerius, perceiving that persecution was in vain, and smitten with mortal sickness, issued an Edict—which Constantine and Licinius also signed—granting to Christians full legal right to exist and hold their assemblies, and beseeching Christians to pray to their God for his recovery. The legal significance of the Edict is that Christianity is for the first time definitely recognised as a *religio licita*.

Daia did not sign this Edict, and had he had longer time, he might have done great things for the restoration of paganism. Events, however, were against him.

After Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge, he and Licinius, meeting at Milan in 313 A.D., issued the famous Edict which constitutes a landmark in the history of human liberty. "We have long seen that we have no business to refuse freedom of religion. The power of seeing to matters of belief must be left to the judgment and desire of each individual according to the man's own free will." Licinius then opened a campaign against Daia, who,

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completely defeated and fleeing for his life, issued an Edict (313 A.D.) ordering persecution to cease, granting Christians liberty of worship and requiring their confiscated property to be restored to them.

THE VICTORY OF THE CHURCH

Persecution by the State was at an end, although twice the sky was again overcast. The first cloud arose when Licinius and Constantine, who shared the Imperial power, quarrelled. There is little doubt that both were ambitious of being sole ruler. Against his rival, Licinius called paganism to his side. The brief civil war, which began in 323 A.D., was decided in favour of Constantine and Christianity. The second arose when the noble but apostate Julian was by his devoted troops chosen Emperor in 361 A.D. He did not persecute, but repressed Christianity and favoured paganism. His reign of twenty months was too short and troubled to permit of serious handling of the religious question, nor did his reformed paganism, with institutions modelled on the Christian Church, make much popular appeal. In his projected revival and res-

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toration of paganism Julian had little success and no successor. The words attributed to him, "Galilean, Thou hast conquered," are probably—like so many dying words—apochryphal; but they express the reality of the situation.

It is a common but erroneous belief that Constantine "established" the Church. All that he did was first to give Christianity toleration, and then—perhaps carried along by a force he could not control, and at first did not contemplate yielding to—make Christianity, as embodied in the Catholic Church, more and more a privileged religion. It soon appeared that the toleration of Milan, so far as Christians were concerned, did not extend to heretics or schismatics.

Under Theodosius the Great (379-395 A.D.), Christianity advanced from being a highly privileged religion to the position of a religion with exclusive rights. Under Justinian, in the middle of the sixth century, pagans lost all rights, and thenceforward baptism of pagans by compulsion became familiar, at least in the East. The victory of the Catholic Church was complete. As to what kind of victory it was, we shall consider some points in the closing chapter.

V

THE EFFECTS OF PERSECUTION

THE effects of persecution on the Church were manifold and far-reaching.

1. On any body of people the effect of persecution will be either to scatter them, isolate them, and so reduce them to impotence; or to drive them closer together, to establish new bonds among them and so strengthen them. The latter proved to be the result in the case of Christians. They might be hampered and hindered in many ways; open propaganda might become almost impossible; but persecution was undoubtedly one factor that helped to weld the primitive, more or less independent communities into one Church. A persecuted body must rely more and more on its responsible leaders, and, if it be resolved to weather the storm, it must strive to keep close touch among its disparate sections. From the first, Christian churches had certain means of keeping in contact and resolving upon common action; they had a peripatetic ministry in Apostles

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and "prophets," they circulated Epistles, and they exchanged correspondence. But the circumstance that they were persecuted must have drawn the bonds much tighter and made the bonds appear much more valuable. Leaders had a new importance, and common action a new sanction. Persecution, then, was one among many factors which explain the emergence of the Bishop as the most important official.

Nor did propaganda cease, though its methods might change. It was none the less effective though it was underground. In a very literal sense, times of fierce persecution drove the Church underground. The only legal status that Christians as a body could obtain was found by registering as burial societies. As such they might meet once in ten days. Not only so, but, markedly in Rome itself, vast subterranean burial-places—the Catacombs—were excavated and religious services were conducted therein, though the numbers at such services could only have been small at one time. In other places Christians met under cover of darkness, but meet for worship they did. All legitimate, honourable methods of evading suspicion and arrest were used. The de-

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velopment of ingenious cryptic symbols which took place was probably designed to serve as one of its purposes the founding of a system of secret signs and conventions by which Christians might distinguish friends from possible foes.

2. Persecution was, we may say, the primary reason for the appearance of the most important group of Christian writings since the Apostolic Age, viz. the works of the Apologists. The Apologists, indeed, do more than explain Christianity with a view to obviate State-persecution. Sometimes they have the Jews in mind; sometimes attacks on the new religion by pagan writers. But it is mainly in view of the State-persecution that they write. Those writings of Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Origen, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Arnobius, Lactantius, and others are very valuable, not only for their able argument, designed to show what Christians are and why their religion should be welcomed, not persecuted, but for the light they cast on the inner life of the Church and the sidelights thrown upon contemporary heathenism. They describe Christian worship and set forth Christian ethic and Christian doctrine. They do so as describers of

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what existed, but they had an even greater importance as giving all Christians a norm of what should be. The Apologists are the first theologians; their views had great influence on all succeeding Christian thought; they had a large share in creating the unity and uniformity of belief and practice which they assume.

3. That persecution would have a winnowing influence on the membership of the Church, separating chaff from wheat, is obvious; and that itself had important consequences. For persecution divided professing Christians into three classes: (*a*) the creditably large number who stood firm, not court- ing persecution, using all honourable means to save their lives as the Lord commanded, "When they persecute you in this city, flee into another" (Matt. x. 23), but, when honourable escape was impossible, gladly suffering for His name's sake; (*b*) a small fanatical section who courted martyrdom and despised those who fled; (*c*) a regrettably large body who yielded, formally committing an idolatrous act and so securing immunity. Of the latter class, some—the *Sacrificati*—definitely sacrificed to idols or to Cæsar's genius; others—the *Libellatici*—pro-

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cured by more or less dishonourable means certificates of exemption from penalty.

In the pauses of persecution the Church was grievously perplexed as to her treatment of those two classes of the fallen (*Lapsi*). Were they to be restored to Church membership and privilege or not? So far there was general agreement—none of the *Lapsi* could be restored twice, and of the *Lapsi* the *Libellatici* were generally considered less heinously guilty. As to their restoration, however, there was strong difference of opinion. Some were disposed to be compassionate, and to be willing to receive back the *Libellatici* after a prolonged period of discipline which in all conscience was severe enough. Others held that, while the fallen might be encouraged to hope in the mercy of God, if they sincerely repented, the Church ought on no condition to receive them back into her fellowship, they having put themselves for ever outside the pale. This question led to great trouble in Africa, and finally to the Novatian schism which, starting in Rome (A.D. 250), spread far and wide, the Novatianists holding that no person once excommunicated should ever be restored. The same question

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was one of the causes of the Donatist schism in Africa in the fourth century, and of the Miletian schism in Egypt.

4. From a primitive innocent tendency to venerate the memory of martyrs and Confessors important developments took place which worked considerable changes in worship and in belief. It was natural and fitting that the memory and memorials of martyrs should be preserved. The anniversaries of their martyrdom were observed and described as the birthdays—*natalicia*—of the glorious dead. By and by little memorial chapels were erected on the site of executions. In those chapel-services new rites were introduced which in time became familiar features of public worship. Thus, while early in the third century Tertullian derides the heathen for burning candles in daylight, by the fourth century the use of lighted candles had passed from the memorial chapels into ordinary Church services.

Natural as it was to preserve the relics of the martyrs, more and more as time passed, such relics were endowed in the popular mind with miracle-working power, and were regarded with a veneration that was hard to distinguish from worship.

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In the writings of such as Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian, we find, along with quite natural sentiments designed to fortify the hearts of those exposed to peril of death for their Faith, the germs at least of the view that martyrs have acquired a surplusage of merit and a specially high reward. Commemoration of the faithful departed was of very early origin in Christian worship; with this view of merit and special dignity it was an easy transition to pray not so much *for* the saint as *to* the saint. It took long for the doctrine of a "treasury of merit" to be definitely set forth—that was not accomplished till the Middle Ages. But the start of it lies in this third-century exaltation of the special merits of the martyrs, as the invocation of the saints follows from the belief in their special reward.

5. The honour paid to Confessors who had witnessed a good confession took another very unfortunate direction. There was naturally a tendency to pay all deference to whatever wishes a Confessor might express. Some Confessors developed the custom of sending letters to the Bishops asking for lenient treatment for friends of theirs who under stress of persecution had either apostatised or se-

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cured immunity by dubious means. Such requests were known as letters of peace—*libelli pacis*. In the Province of Africa in particular those *libelli* grew to be a scandal. They were alleged to be frequently forged, and even to be on sale. Cyprian's stern action in suppressing the scandal led to a brief schism in Africa, headed by Felicissimus (250 A.D.).

CHRISTIANS AND THE STATE

A startling contrast lies between the attitude of the New Testament Epistles and that of the Apocalypse towards the State. In the former, Cæsar is God's minister to whom, *quâ* magistrate, armed not in vain with the sword for the repression of evil, all honour is due. In the latter, Cæsarism is the scarlet woman drunk with the blood of the saints, the dragon, and so on—a power essentially of evil with whom Christ is at war. That change, of course, is due to this: that while St. Paul benefited sometimes from Roman protection, the Apocalypticist has seen and experienced Roman persecution. The view of the Empire taken in the Apocalypse found few supporters. With few exceptions Christians

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kept the view that, though Cæsar might be a persecutor, the Empire was an almost divine institution for the stability and welfare of which they earnestly prayed. As belief in the immediacy of the second Advent waned, Christians more and more felt it their duty to serve the State in all ways open to them. Before the close of the third century some of the most responsible positions were filled by Christians, and Tertullian's view that Cæsar could not be a Christian was no longer felt to be true; if Christians were not yet on the throne, they were on the steps of it.

THE MODEL OF THE STATE

As the Church expanded, and more complex organisation became necessary, she followed the model of the organisation of the State. Her churches were *basilicae*; the higher ranks of her clergy were analogous to, and in some cases named after, the higher secular officials. That was carried out completely only after the Empire became Christian, but the process was begun before. Although Cyprian had strongly maintained the equality of all Bishops,

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such equality continued for no length of time. The Bishop of the metropolis of a province naturally became the Metropolitan who presided over the provincial synod; and as the primitive presiding Presbyter-Bishop soon acquired a higher function than that of merely presiding, so did the Metropolitan or Archbishop among the Bishops of the province. The process did not, we may say could not, stop there. Suggested by the dazzling analogy of Cæsar at the head of descending ranks of officials subordinate to him, a transformation took place whereby the very early primacy of respect paid to the Roman See became a primacy of real governmental significance. What Cæsar was in the Empire the Bishop of Rome should be in the Church. That final step took centuries fully to accomplish, and its accomplishment was perhaps the main reason for the unhappy schism between East and West—Constantinople realising that it could maintain its claim to equality with Rome only by schism—but it is clearly enough foreshadowed within the period we are considering. This analogy of the Emperor was only one factor in the rise of the Papacy, but it was a factor of great importance. Beyond all question the rise of the

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Papacy as it existed in the Middle Ages owed a great deal to Constantine's abandonment of Rome for the new capital, Constantinople. From of old, Rome was invested with a numinous prestige which was sufficient to restrain any barbarian conqueror from presuming to set his throne in the city. Into that inheritance the Bishop of Rome entered. In a real enough sense Constantine left Rome to the Pope. It was a stupid and quite unnecessary blunder on the part of the Mediæval Church to forge documents declaring that he had done so by way of legal bequest.

VI

CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM

IN this chapter we consider some important points which emerged in the conquest by Christianity of the Græco-Roman world.

THE PAGAN CRITICISM OF CHRISTIANITY

Christian Apologists had not only to try so to explain Christianity that Cæsar might cease his persecution; they had to deal with popular slanders and with literary attack. The slanders have been already noted. Apologists met them with indignant denial and incisive counter-charges. Perhaps more effective was the answer given by the life that Christians lived. No more was heard of gross charges after the second century.

Most important of the literary attacks on Christianity were those made by Celsus, Lucian, Porphyry, Hierocles, and a few historians who wrote after the victory of Christianity was secured.

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Celsus, about the middle of the second century, thought the new religion important enough to receive minute examination, which he gave it in a considerable work entitled *The True Word*. Celsus was an eclectic philosopher of dialectical skill who had evidently considerable knowledge of our Gospels and Epistles and the Old Testament. He turns against Christianity the weapons of wit, sarcasm, and learning. Jesus, he suggests, is the son of Mary and a Roman soldier Panthera. His divinity is refuted by Peter's denial, Judas's betrayal, and His ignominious death. The Resurrection is a figment. Why should God come down to earth or send another down? Such a change in God is unnecessary and indeed impossible for the divine nature. Christianity is irrational, and makes way among the people only by its imaginary terrors of future punishment. Celsus finds very objectionable features in Christianity in its promises to the miserable, and the offer of forgiveness and regeneration. Christians preach to the uncultured classes; from mechanics, slaves, women, and children, the easy victims of delusion, its adherents are mostly drawn. The early disciples were deliberate deceivers who fabricated the

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Gospel miracles, especially the Resurrection, but contradicted themselves. Jesus, too, was a deceiver who learned deceit in Egypt.

About the same time Lucian attacked Christianity with the weapons of wit and ridicule which he used against all the religions of his time. In Christianity he saw one of the many follies of mankind; in its miracles, jugglery; in its hope of immortality, an empty dream; in the brotherly love of Christians, a silly enthusiasm.

Porphyry of Tyre (*d.* 304 A.D.), one of the most distinguished of the Neo-Platonists, wrote *Discourses Against Christians* in fifteen books, a work which we know only from the long citations given by its refuters, Methodius of Tyre, Eusebius, and Apollinarius of Laodicea. Porphyry attacked the sacred books of the Christians with fuller knowledge of them than Celsus possessed. With keen criticism he pointed out contradictions between the two Testaments and among the Apostles themselves, and on that account denied the divine inspiration of the books. From the conflict between Paul and Peter he inferred that the doctrine of such Apostles must be false. Even Jesus he charged with inconsistency.

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Yet he did not wholly disapprove of Christianity. He is very modern in trying to distinguish the original pure teaching of Jesus from the later adulterated doctrine of Apostles. "We must not calumniate Christ who was most eminent for piety, but only pity those who worship Him as God." "That pious soul, exalted to Heaven, is become by a sort of fate an occasion of delusion to those souls from whom fortune withholds the gift of the gods and the knowledge of the immortal Zeus."

In the time of Diocletian, Hierocles, a bitter instigator and advocate of persecution, wrote *Truth-loving Words to the Christians*, which was answered by Eusebius. Hierocles repeats the arguments of Celsus and Porphyry, but he is most interesting for the parallel that he draws between Jesus and Apollonius of Tyana, greatly in favour of the latter. This Apollontius was a Pythagorean soothsayer who died about 90 A.D. His life was idealised by Philostratus about 220 A.D., who represented him as an ascetic saint, a religious reformer and worker of miracles. Whether Philostratus intended Apollonius to be exalted as a rival to Jesus and Christian Apostles is not clear. The alleged details about Apollonius are cer-

tainly striking—he was the son of Jupiter, cast out demons, raised the dead, spoke all languages, and, after labouring in Tarsus, Antioch-Ephesus, etc., was persecuted by Nero, and reappeared after his death. Hierocles certainly holds up Apollonius as superior to Jesus.

The Emperor Julian—the Apostate—wrote a large work, *Discourses Against the Christians*, which has perished save for citations in the writings of Cyril of Alexandria, who refuted it. Julian held that Christianity was a degraded Judaism, and, like Porphyry, he represented the Christian worship of Christ and veneration of martyrs as opposed to Christ's own teaching.

When the Western Empire was falling to pieces and Rome itself attacked by barbarian hordes, writers such as Eunapius and Zosimus declared that the calamities were due to the contempt of the religion under which Rome had grown to power. This criticism led to St. Augustine's masterly philosophy of history as expounded in *The City of God*.

None of those efforts by pagan apologists had any appreciable influence on the progress of Chris-

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tianity. They served only to stimulate the minds of Christian Apologists to answer their criticisms.

PAGANISM INFLUENCED BY CHRISTIANITY

If it be a little doubtful whether Philostratus in the third century was definitely influenced by Christianity in setting forth Apollonius of Tyana as a rival to Christ, beyond all doubt the reformed paganism of the fourth century was profoundly transfused with Christian influence. Its professional priests were modelled on the Christian clergy, and its devotions upon Christian services. In the probably unpublished work of Sallustius (363 A.D.), *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, we find a fundamental ethical monotheism which explains the gods and the myths allegorically, and enjoins a high type of life as the truest service of God. Such movements are interesting only as testimony to the impress that Christianity had made; in themselves, for their own ends, they were quite futile.

NEO-PLATONISM

Greek philosophy came to its climax in Neo-Platonism. How far it embraced Christian elements,

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or even admitted of Christian influence, is disputable. Its teachers can scarcely have avoided contact with the Christian thinkers of Alexandria. Its importance, however, lies rather in the other direction; as is now generally recognised, it powerfully and beneficially influenced Christian thought. In particular, it had the merit of leading Christian thought to a clear view that God is Spirit, timeless and bodiless. In their thoughts of God even Christians of intellectual power had not quite escaped a naïve anthropomorphism which was not conquered without a struggle. Even such a great thinker as Tertullian held that God had "body." From the time of St. Augustine, who was himself steeped in Platonism, Neo-Platonism exercised a potent influence. Its view of life and duty did not markedly differ from the Christian view. Its defect was lack of anything corresponding to the Christian doctrine of Incarnation.

DID CHRISTIANITY BORROW FROM PAGANISM?

The possible debt of Christianity to paganism, and to the mystery religions in particular, has been much discussed, and no general agreement has been

reached. It is obvious that on many points much was common in the thought of Christians and pagan thinkers, and, as we have noted, Christianity was greatly influenced by the philosophical thought and tendencies current in its formative period. It could not well have been otherwise. That, however, is not quite the question. The difficulty is, did Christianity take over from paganism any element which came to be essential to it? To discuss that question adequately would require lengthy treatment such as cannot be given here. We should first have to discuss the question, What is essential Christianity? and come to a finding on the disputed problem as to the probability or improbability of St. Paul having been influenced, e.g., in his sacramental doctrine, by the mystery religions. Here we can do no more than note one or two general considerations. On the one hand, such was the fierceness with which Christians criticised all that savoured of heathenism, such in particular was their opposition to the mystery religions, that it is incredible that consciously and deliberately they adopted any heathen element at all. On the other hand, one must remember that if the Church deliberately adopted nothing from

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heathenism, it drew into its membership men whose whole previous thought and practice had been heathen, and that when the spread of Christianity was marked by something approaching mass-conversion, there was not only the possibility but the strong probability of many professed Christians coming into the Church, with little instruction as to the error of their former beliefs. The history of the Church can show many instances of what was at first vague popular belief or practice being ultimately adopted as the official teaching or practice of the Church.

Beyond all question it is easy to show that many things which survive as customs, the original significance of which has long been forgotten, were originally elements in pagan religion. The policy of Christian evangelists of the first three centuries to abolish among professed Christians all traces of the old worship was radically altered in the sixth century, when Pope Gregory I instructed his evangelists to change no more than was necessary, to Christianise the religious customs of the people rather than seek to destroy them. In perhaps the majority of cases no harm resulted from this; in some in-

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stances, however, there will be general agreement that pre-Christian beliefs and practices survive with such vigour as to constitute a grave menace to Christian truth.

THE VICTORY OF CHRISTIANITY OVER ITS RIVALS

When we consider how the world in the first three Christian centuries was full of ideas very similar to those which Christianity was inculcating, how many movements in philosophy and religion were in competition, and how Christianity was engaged all the time in more or less of a struggle for its very existence, it cannot but appear marvellous that Christianity should not only have survived, but have beaten its rivals out of the field. Of this victory various explanations have been given, and no doubt many factors must be considered. The zeal and enthusiasm of the early Christians was certainly one factor, but in that regard Christians were by no means unique. Teachers and preachers of many other religions were comparable to Christians in their arduous labours, their journeys, their zeal. Nor ought too great stress to be put on the superiority

of the Christian ethic. As we have seen, it is not easy, except in the case of the virtue of chastity and perhaps also of brotherly love, to show that the Christian ethic was markedly higher than that of the time. Further, the higher moral demands of Christianity would surely prove a hindrance rather than a help in securing adherents. In any case, a mere matter of degree of stringency in the moral code does not take us very far in explaining the victory of Christianity.

There was one point about Christians which greatly impressed the heathen world, and that was their attitude to death. Not only were Christians ready to face death cheerfully for the sake of their Faith, but they altogether transformed the prevailing idea that death was an occasion for mourning. At a Christian funeral in the early centuries all the accustomed trappings of woe disappeared, the cortège was much more like a triumphal procession. With the lapse of time the familiar mournings came back. It was probably more than human hearts could endure to celebrate a funeral as though it were a festival. But the transformation endured

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sufficiently long to make a profound impression on the heathen.

In some important particulars Christianity stood in strong contrast to the mystery religions which were its strongest rivals. In its primitive form Christianity was not associated with the magical elements which its rivals admitted. Religion and magic are antagonistic, and religion has always had to fight to maintain itself against magic. In the mystery religions, elements of genuine spiritual and religious value were overlaid by, and inextricably mixed with, magic, and the truth of the doctrines taught was dimmed by their association with fanciful, superstitious, and often grotesque elements. Christianity had an enormous advantage in being so free from the feigned miracles and the tricks by which pagan priests sought to impress their hearers. Early Christianity had a minimum of rite and symbolism; it was simple to a degree in which no pagan cult was simple. Its adherents were not in the danger in which the less intelligent adherents of the cults stood of taking a magical instead of a spiritual view of what was set before them. The fact that magical conceptions did at a later time corrupt Christianity

does not affect the argument that between early Christianity and the pagan cults there was in this regard a very wide gulf.

Again, it is undoubtedly the case that Christianity secured, and kept, far greater unity and inter-communication among its adherents than any of its rivals. What means were used for binding together, e.g., Mithraists we do not know, although it is scarcely credible that a movement so widespread and so persistent possessed none. It is, however, safe to say that Christianity had a great advantage in its conception of one Catholic Church—a conception which rapidly grew in strength from the early second century onwards. The conception of the Church as a unity was indeed implicated from the beginning. "On this rock I will build my Church," said Jesus; and in the Pauline conceptions of the Church as the "body of Christ," or the "building," or the "bride"—which last the Apocalypse emphasises—the idea of one Catholic Church is clearly involved. From the second century onwards it becomes more and more explicit. A Church once founded in a city maintained continuous existence and close relationships with other Churches. In the

simple fact that there was a Christian Church, while there was no Orphic or Mithraic or other "Church" in any comparable sense, we have one very important factor in the explanation of the survival and victory of Christianity.

Of great importance, too, was the unique claim maintained by Christians for the sole validity of their Faith. The mystery religions, we may say, had as their motto "Live and let live." Christians were frankly and uncompromisingly intolerant—"We alone have the truth, we alone are sure of salvation; all you others are wrong and doomed to perdition." The adherents of the pagan cults were not so confident of the truth of their own religion. Men might try one after another; all were much alike. To some extent the cults cancelled one another out. They could not all be absolutely true; none, indeed, claimed to be so. On the other hand, it was the constant claim of Christianity that it alone had the truth, and alone could save. This "intolerance," as we have seen, involved Christians in trouble; beyond doubt it contributed to the triumph of their Faith.

Of altogether supreme importance was the

circumstance that while the cults were based on myths—and every intelligent person recognised them for myths—Christianity based itself on historic facts. Its inspiration was drawn from a real Person who had lived and died not so long ago, whose trial and death were noted by Roman historians, and as to whose real existence no question was raised by the strongest critics of Christianity. It would take long to expound all that that means. It is unnecessary to do so, the enormous advantages it conferred on Christianity are so obvious. The great religions that have lived for any length of time have been founded by historical personages. The beauty and truth of myths and allegories may be very notable; but what kept Christians loyal in face of persecution, and urged them on to the conquest of the world, was not primarily the beauty and truth of Christ's teaching, but intense devotion to Himself who had, as matter of historical fact, lived and suffered and died to save them. Christian evangelists did not follow cunningly devised fables. The earliest of them testified of what they personally had seen and heard and handled, and their successors of what had come to

them as a record of fact from them who had accompanied with Jesus.

Lastly, of vital importance must have been this factor—Christianity fulfilled its contract much more fully than any of its rivals that were making similar promises. Ultimately it must have won by sheer merit, as attested in the spiritual experiences of those who passed to Christianity from paganism even at its best. We may grant that many a troubled heart and perplexed mind and uneasy conscience probably found satisfaction so far in the pagan cults—their success is proof of it. It was Christianity, however, that survived. Revivals within paganism were sporadic and evanescent. It is scarcely too severe to describe them as attempts to galvanise a corpse. After due weight has been given to such considerations as are set down above, the deepest secret of the victory of Christianity must be sought here—in the spiritual experience of those who accepted it. In the touching words of the venerable Polycarp (martyred 155 A.D.), “Eighty and six years am I His servant, and He hath done me no wrong,” we find the deepest reason for the survival and victory of Christianity—it never let men down.

VII

GNOSTICISM

GNOSTICISM was a syncretistic religious philosophy which flourished alongside Christianity more or less three centuries, invaded the Church, and threatened to obliterate the essential features of genuine Christian teaching. Had Gnosticism conquered, Christianity would have been no more than a mystery religion.

Gnosticism has often appeared to be a tangled mass of fantastic speculations. In its various and especially its later forms, it does show many fantastic details; but if we do not lose ourselves in too keen a search for minutiae, we shall find in it a quite intelligible and even imposing system. Gnostics themselves probably considered many of the details which distinguished the various systems as unessential; and it may be said that Gnostic schools were, broadly speaking, at one in holding a system the main features of which were as follows:

I. A SPECIAL REVELATION. The word *gnosis* must

not mislead us into thinking that the Gnostic was one who prized intellectual knowledge as superior to faith. What the Gnostic boasted of was a fuller and better revelation. For this revelation they claimed no personal credit; it had been handed down to them. Its author was Christ, or one of His Apostles, or a friend of one of the Apostles; and in several cases they professed to be able to give the history of its transmission. Thus Basilides claims Glaukias, an interpreter of St. Peter. Valentinus claims Theodas, an acquaintance of St. Paul's. Others appealed to a secret tradition imparted to a few by Jesus Himself.

2. DUALISM. This is the foundation principle of all Gnostic systems; from it everything else follows. In Gnosticism we have primarily Eastern dualism combined with the Greek form. In Eastern thought a sharp distinction was drawn between the world of light and the world of darkness—two eternal antagonistic principles in unceasing conflict. Greek dualism was between *phenomena*—the world of sense appearance—and *noumena*—the realm of real being. In Gnosticism the Pleroma, the world of goodness and light, is contrasted with the Kenoma,

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the kingdom of evil and darkness. This Gnostic dualism comes to lie between God and matter, two eternal entities of which matter is essentially evil.

3. DEMIURGE. The Gnostic's problem was to find an explanation of evil. This has exercised the mind of man and lain heavily on his heart throughout his generations. The Gnostic took the view suggested by Tennyson:

Why is all around us here
As if some lesser God had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as He would?

The Gnostic reasoned that this so imperfect world cannot be the work of God, who is wholly good and all-wise; it must be the blundering effort of some inferior being. The world was the work of a Demiurge, whose character was variously conceived by different schools; some making him simply ignorant, others representing him as an enemy of God. The God of the Jews was identified with this Demiurge.

As to the origin of the Demiurge, some held him to belong to the realm of evil. The characteristic view, however, was that he was an emanation far

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removed from God. This theory of emanation was a prominent feature of most of the systems. The view was that from God there emanated a series of beings called *Æons*, each step in the genealogy implying a diminution of purity; and the Demiurge was the creation of an *Æon* far down, indeed the lowest, in the scale. Nature and human nature, then, are the work of a Demiurge either ignorant of, or hostile to, the true God. A few schools had only one Demiurge, but many had seven. Without doubt the seven are the seven astronomical deities of Perso-Babylonian religion.

4. REDEMPTION. Christian and Gnostic are at one in finding in this world goodness fettered and thwarted by evil. They differ entirely in their conception of the conflict. The familiar Christian view is that into a world originally of perfect order and goodness a fallen angel brought confusion and evil. The common Gnostic view is that into a world originally evil a fallen *Æon* brought a spark of life and goodness. The fall of this *Æon* is explained sometimes as due to weakness, sometimes as the result of a sinful passion for the *Kenoma*. Howsoever the *Æon* fell, it is imprisoned in the world,

in the Kenoma, and longs for deliverance and return to the Pleroma. In answer to this the most perfect Æon becomes a redeemer, descends and after innumerable sufferings is able to lead back the fallen Æon to the Pleroma, where he unites with her in a spiritual marriage. Redemption is thus primarily cosmical; but in redeeming a fallen Æon the Saviour has made possible salvation of individual souls. To the Gnostic he imparts clear knowledge of the ideal world to be striven after, and prompts him to strive. The soul at all points, before and after death, was opposed by hostile spirits; and a large part of Gnostic teaching consisted in instructing the soul as to how those enemies could be overcome. Here comes in the tangle of magico-mystical teaching which formed so large an element in the later schools. All sorts of rites—baptisms, stigmatisings, sealing, piercing the ears, holy foods and drinks—were enjoined. It was important also to know the names of the spirits, and the words by which they could be mastered.

5. CHRISTOLOGY. In union with Christianity, Gnosticism of course identified its Saviour with Jesus. We shall consider that later. Meanwhile we note that all Christianised Gnostics held a peculiar

view of the Person of Christ. To them Jesus was a pure spirit, and it was incredible that He should come into close contact with matter, the root of all evil. He had no true body, but an assumed appearance in order to reveal Himself to man. Some held that the Saviour united Himself with the man Jesus at the Baptism and left Him again before the Death. Others held that the body was a pure phantom. All agreed that the Divine Saviour was neither born nor capable of death. Such a view of Christ's Person is *docetism*.

6. MANKIND. The Gnostics divided mankind into three classes: the hylic, the psychic, and the spiritual. The heathen were hylic, the Jews psychic, and Christians spiritual. But further within the Christian religion itself the majority are only psychic; the Gnostics alone were certain of return to the Kingdom of Light, but some at least were disposed to think charitably of the destiny of the psychics, who might attain a measure of felicity. Gnostics, as we should expect, denied a resurrection of the body.

7. THE OLD TESTAMENT. While there existed a Judaistic Gnosticism which with various modifications accepted the Old Testament, the great mass

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of Gnostics were anti-Judaistic and rejected the Jewish Scriptures. This followed from their identification of the God of the Jews with the Demiurge. This also explains why some schools reversed the values of the Old Testament making heroes of the characters represented therein as wicked.

8. WORSHIP. Gnosticism tended in two opposite directions comparable with puritanism and ritualism respectively. The abhorrence of matter led some to the utmost simplicity of worship, some rejecting all external rites. On the other hand, many groups, especially the Marcosians, went to the opposite extreme with symbolism and mystic pomp. This may seem inconsistent with their views of matter, but it is in line with the ideas of magico-mystical salvation indicated above. Sacraments were numerous, rites many and varied. It seems clear that they led the way in introducing features which the Catholic Church adopted. They were distinguished as hymn-writers. The followers of Basilides seem to have been the first to celebrate Epiphany. Other schools were pioneers in the introduction of images.

9. ETHIC. The ethic also took two directions, one towards antinomianism, the other towards a gloomy

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asceticism. The former held that sensuality is to be overcome by indulging it to exhaustion. The later abhorred matter, and strove to avoid all contact with flesh as far as possible. This led them to forbid marriage and indulgence in certain kinds of food. This ethic in both branches is the unfailing outcome of the primary dualism characteristic of Gnosticism.

ORIGIN OF GNOSTICISM

The older view that Gnostics were Christian heretics is now abandoned. As has been shown, the age with which we are dealing was marked by nothing more strongly than by its syncretism. All the faiths and philosophies of the world met and became fluid. Strange combinations resulted and were dissolved again for lack of something round which they might take definite shape. Before the appearance of Christianity, Gnosticism was vague and unstable. Christianity afforded it a point round which the vague Gnostic movements could crystallise and attain a measure of permanence. There can be no doubt that Gnosticism was primarily an Eastern religious philosophy. It is modified some-

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what by contact with Judaism and in a very important way by Greek philosophy. Men imbued with Gnostic views would find many points of resemblance between themselves and Christianity which dealt in a way with the very problems that interested the Gnostics. There is, for example, much in the New Testament that seemed to be precisely what the Gnostics held—the world lay in wickedness; the flesh was to be mortified; there was a law in the members warring against the spirit, and so on. It is a misconception to regard such Christian teaching as the starting-point of Gnosticism which had attained a considerable development before Christianity appeared. But in such teaching Gnosticism found points of attachment to Christianity and attempted to shelter within the Church. Or, to vary the figure, growing from distinct roots of its own, it twined itself about the stem of the Christian tree like a parasite.

THE CONTEST AND ITS RESULTS

The contest between Christianity and Gnosticism was a vital one. Had Gnosticism conquered, the

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vital essence of Christianity would have been destroyed, and Christianity would have been just one more mystery religion. The distinction between the supreme God and the Demiurge would have been fatal to Christian monotheism. Gnosticism aimed at producing philosophers, not saints. Its redemption is not the Christian redemption; there is no atonement and no real need, therefore no real place, for the historical Jesus. As has been said, the Gnostic theory of redemption is tacked on to the story of Jesus, but the joints are manifest. This cutting away of Christianity from the historical facts on which it was based would have been disastrous.

Nothing is so admirable as the way in which the early Church—ill provided as she was with creeds, difficult as it was for her leaders to consult together, subjected as she was to persecution, and having other conflicts to wage—realised the danger and overcame it in a struggle which was begun in the first century, came to its height in the second, and did not die down till towards the end of the third.

The Church was not altogether resourceless. She had the Old Testament, to the teaching of which about God as Creator of all she resolutely held; and

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she had the Epistles of St. Paul, in which errors similar to those of Gnosticism—incipient Gnosticism, we may say—are strongly condemned.

But what sort of a victory did the Church secure, and what were the effects of the conflict upon her?

1. In several respects Gnostics were pioneers whom the Church followed; viz. hymn-writing, the use of images in worship, the development of the Christian year, the Gnostics being the first to celebrate Epiphany. The circumstance that in some Gnostic systems the Æons were pictured as male and female may have been one among many factors which led gradually to the semi-divine honour paid to the Blessed Virgin. The belief of the Ophites that when the sacred serpent touched the eucharistic bread it was transformed and only then became a vehicle of blessing may have been one element in the growth of the theory of transubstantiation. From Gnosticism and the mystery religions Christianity may have taken over more in the direction of magical conceptions than she was aware.

2. The appeal of Gnostics to writings or traditions purporting to come from the Apostles compelled the Church to determine what writings should be al-

lowed authority. The formation of a Canon of the New Testament was not complete till almost the end of the fourth century; but long before that Christian Churches were in a large measure of agreement as to what books out of the many that were in circulation in the second century should be quoted as in anywise authoritative.

3. Not only did a Canon of Scripture come to be of primary importance as a means of testing doctrines taught, but the idea was more and more strongly held of the importance of the Bishops as conservers of the true Christian tradition. Irenæus, for example, refutes the Valentinian Gnostics by such an argument. The succession of Bishops in such a Church as Rome can be traced back to the Apostles. Each Bishop received the deposit from his predecessor and handed it on to his successor. There has been no change in the process. What the Church in Irenæus's day holds, the Church of the Apostolic Age held; the unbroken succession of Bishops is the guarantee. Henceforward the Orthodox Church meets all heresies and tests them by that two-fold appeal to the Canonical writings and the

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succession of Bishops. The Church holds the Apostolic and primitive faith.

4. As against the Gnostics the Church had to clear up her own mind on the problems they raised. More elaborate creeds had to be formulated, and the contents of those primitive creeds can be understood only if we realise that they were the Church's refutation of the errors of the day. Thus the statements of fact about the Birth and Death of Jesus in the so-called Apostles' Creed are the Church's refutation of the Docetic views of Gnostics, while the Creatorship of God is asserted against the Demiurgic idea and the Sonship of Christ against the theory of emanation.

5. The question, however, must be raised, Did the Church really conquer Gnosticism, or had she to cross over herself to take Gnostic ground? Opinions will differ. There is no doubt about the fact that over against the religious philosophy of Gnosticism the orthodox religious philosophy arose, and the influence of Gnosticism in the development of what came to be the imposing structure of Catholic doctrine cannot be ignored. From the conflict the Church emerged with a profound change of em-

phasis. Henceforward a man's attitude to the Creed is of primary importance in determining whether he has to be recognised as a Christian or not. The simple question, "Do you believe in Christ?" disappears before the totally different question, "Do you believe thus and thus about Christ?" No doubt the simple Gospel of primitive days is still there; but it is more and more associated with, until it is in danger of being obscured in, a whole religious philosophy. It took long centuries for that encyclopædic philosophy to be completed. It was not finished till the Middle Ages were making way for the Renaissance, by which time it embraced a mass of speculations as unbased in experience and in some cases quite as fantastic as the speculations of the Gnostics, a circumstance which gives point to the question, "Did orthodox theology itself become a Gnosticism?" The Church set resolutely aside the Gnostic placing of knowledge as superior to faith, but the Faith, as the Church now understood it, was very like what the Gnostic meant by *Gnosis*. The seeds of that development which culminated in Scholasticism were planted in the actual conflict of the second and third centuries. Christianity was

thoroughly Hellenised as soon as Greek minds like Clement of Alexandria busied themselves with Christian truth. It took long centuries to reach the position of the so-called Athanasian Creed: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith; which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this"—well, what is it? If one reads and considers the Athanasian Creed, one will perceive that according to it the Faith which saves is not so much the saving Faith of the New Testament as assent to a saving knowledge. Unless one knows and accepts the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas here so minutely set forth, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. We are a long, long way from the primitive "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The reader will probably feel that the change is very striking, and may be pardoned if he feels it to be even tragic. Did Gnosticism win after all? One is left wondering.

VIII

THE OLD TESTAMENT

FROM the start the Apostolic Church had the Old Testament in its hands, and Christians were taught to regard it as the Word of God. It was not long, however, until the question emerged, How much of the Old Testament is binding for Christians? Our Lord Himself had in some particulars set its precepts aside. The conflict with the Judaisers must have left many minds perplexed. The Anti-Judaism of certain Christians from the beginning of the second century, and the views of the Gnostics made the question as to the authority of the Old Testament still more complicated.

MARCION

Few went so far in the criticism of the Old Testament as authoritative for Christians as Marcion, a native of Sinope. He flourished in the first half of the second century. A ship-master who had

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travelled much and become rich, he arrived in Rome and gave a handsome contribution to the funds of the Church. When his views became known, the Church refunded his donation. Marcion agreed with the Gnostics in his Docetic view of Christ who, he held, took merely the appearance of man; but he differed fundamentally from the Gnostics in denying the characteristic distinction between the Gnostic and the ordinary Christian. He was, however, more pronounced than many Gnostics in his total rejection of the Old Testament and of its God as the true God. The Gospel to him was something totally new. The New Testament did not grow out of the Old, it was its antithesis. The hard, variable, and ignorant God of the Old Testament cannot be the supreme God. He is limited, He creates evil, He stirs up wars, He changes His mind. If only the Son knows the true God, the Old Testament prophets and Law-givers cannot have known Him. Their God fashioned the world out of matter which He did not make and could not control; and on His arbitrarily chosen people He imposes a Law that they could not keep. The true Supreme was the unknown God till the Son came down to reveal

Him. The Son was not the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, who is to be a conquering king of the Jews only, whereas the Son came to suffer and die for all mankind. The Son came not to fulfil but to destroy the Law; therefore the God of the Jews stirred them up to destroy Him.

Marcion was the first to have a closed Canon of Scripture. He rejected all sacred books except a mutilated Gospel of St. Luke and ten Epistles of St. Paul, also somewhat mutilated. As Tertullian said, he "criticised the Scriptures with a pen-knife." That he had no small critical acumen is shown by his view that the Epistle entitled to the Ephesians was really meant for the Laodiceans. Marcion founded a schismatic Marcionite Church. His followers practised an austere morality, renouncing marriage and the use of flesh and wine. They attracted many, especially women, and had many martyrs.

By his criticism of the Old Testament, Marcion raised a problem which is hardly fully solved even now, though the modern theory of a progressive revelation meets most of his objectives. That theory, however, is a modern one, and the orthodox found

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considerable difficulty in meeting Marcion in detail. The weakness of their argument was covered up by the strength of their vituperation. Marcion, however, served only to strengthen the conviction of the orthodox who followed his great opponent Tertullian, that there is no chasm of incompatibility between the New Testament and the Old; that the new dispensation is vitally connected with the Old; and that in the Scriptures of the Old Testament the Christian had a precious source of light on the questions as to what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

EFFECTS OF THE CONTROVERSY

1. The first effect, as indicated, was to strengthen the conviction of Christians that however much of the Law was superseded, the Old Testament was still very valuable. The Canon of the Old Testament as determined by the Jews in the first century A.D. was accepted without question by the great body of Christians. A difficulty arose, however, about the Apocrypha, which was part of the Bible which the Græco-Roman world received in the

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Septuagint. For centuries Churches varied in their attitude towards it. Some used it as they did Canonical books; others regarded it as not authoritative but still useful for edification; others rejected it entirely. Christendom is still thus divided. In the sixteenth century most of the reformed Churches rejected the Apocrypha, the Anglican Church kept it for edification only, the Roman Church at the Council of Trent decreed it as fully authoritative.

As to the New Testament, the Church rejected decisively Marcion's exiguous Canon. Between the Gnostics and the Montanists on the one hand, who made additions to the generally received authoritative writings, and Marcion on the other hand, who accepted so little, the great body of Christians gradually came to general agreement on the New Testament as we have it. There were, for long, Churches who doubted as to several of the books, and others that used books like *Barnabas* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, which were finally excluded. At the opening of the fourth century, *James*, *Jude*, *2nd Peter*, *2nd* and *3rd John*, and *Revelation* were still classed by Eusebius as disputed books. By the end of the same century they had all secured general

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recognition. On the theory of a Canon, as we shall see, the conflict with Montanism played a very important part.

2. In opposition to Marcion's view of the Old Testament it seems to me probable that the Church swung back to an over-evaluation of the Jewish religion. Christianity took more and more a legalistic colouring. Historical continuity between the old dispensation and the new was so maintained that as much of the old as possible was kept or revived. The Gospel was dangerously transformed into a new Law. The ritualism of the Old Testament was regarded not simply as a shadow of spiritual realities, but as the shadow of a new ritual. While Pauline Christianity allied itself to the prophetism of the Old Testament, from the middle of the third century it leant much more decisively to Old Testament Priestism. If, as Harnack suggests, Marcionism represents the extreme impression made on certain minds by Paulinism, the third century was strongly characterised by un-Paulinism, which attached importance to the Priestly code and looked rather to the Temple than to the Synagogue for its pattern

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of worship. In this development the leading part was played by the great Cyprian of Carthage.

CYPRIAN

Cyprian was one of the formative personalities whose influence determined Catholicism and has been felt in unexpected quarters outside Catholicism—a great commanding figure by which one is tempted to linger. We are not concerned, however, with his distinguished services as a faithful minister who earned the Martyr's Crown in 258 A.D., nor with his reform of the morals of the clergy, nor with his crossing of swords with the See of Rome, nor here with his suppression of the grave scandal of the "letters of peace." What concerns us is the profound change which he was instrumental in introducing in the theory of the Church, Ministry, and Sacrament. As to the first, the conception of one Holy Catholic Church had been growing since the early years of the second century. But Cyprian maintained it with unprecedented insistence and fervour. Outside the Catholic Church there was no salvation, and schism was a deadly sin.

As to the Ministry, Cyprian taught a new view of the Bishop. Many things had conspired to exalt the Bishop. Cyprian set him on a pedestal higher than had theretofore been thought of.

Probably by Cyprian's time the custom was widespread of having only one Bishop in any one city, but Cyprian sets forth how monstrous any other arrangement would be. To him the Episcopate is not the convenient arrangement which it was to Tertullian's mind, but a Divine institution. The Bishop is the mouthpiece of God to the people. The Bishop, therefore, ought not to be elected by the people in presence of the Presbyters and neighbouring Bishops, but by the other Bishops of the province in the presence of the people, according to the Law of Moses. A wise Bishop will consult with his Presbyters, and even consider the wishes of the laity, but that is of grace, not of obligation; he is accountable not to the people but to God.

Further, Cyprian definitely equates the Bishop with the Old Testament Priest. The Presbyters are to the Bishop what Levites were to the Priest. The only difference between the old priesthood and the new is that the latter is permanent.

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Still more important, the Bishop is a sacrificing priest. He has a sacrifice to offer in the Sacrament. The bloodless but real sacrifice that he offers is the passion of our Lord. In Cyprian the doctrine of the Mass as distinct from the Eucharist is indefinite, but it is there in germ.

So from his time on, what had been a boast of Christians that they had no sacrificing priests, no victim on the altar, and no temple ceased to be a differentiation of Christianity from Judaism and paganism. From his time on, too, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers sank rapidly more and more into the background, until the Reformation of the sixteenth century restored it. It is of great significance that Cyprian justifies those views of his on Bishop and Sacrament largely from the Old Testament.

ALLEGORISING

3. To reject Marcion's renunciation of the Old Testament was one thing; it was far more difficult to give a satisfactory positive answer to the question his criticism raised: What precisely is the value of the Old Testament to Christians?

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It was obvious that some of the contents at least of the Jewish Scriptures were obsolete. In view of the growing rigidity of a doctrine of Divine Inspiration, this raised a problem. How could the Word of God become obsolete? Many fell on the view that the literal surface-meaning of Scripture was not the true Word of God, but was only a veil which must be lifted to perceive the real spiritual content. Beneath the literal sense of a passage lay the mystical, allegorical sense which alone was of abiding value.

Towards this allegorising of Scripture the path had been broken among the Jews themselves. In Galatians iv., 24-31, we have an example of how St. Paul could use the common Rabbinical exegesis. Philo Judæus (born abt. 20 B.C.), following the way in which Greek moralists treated Homer, carried out allegorism of the Old Testament to an extreme in which incidents and phrases and even single words were assumed to have a double sense. "All revelation was a Divine cryptogram," says Dean Inge, "which serves the double purpose of concealing the truth from those who are unworthy to receive it, and of magnifying it for the choicer spirits by an

indirect and mysterious mode of presentation." Philo, however, striving to be still a strict Jew, expressly protested against regarding the allegorical sense of the Mosaic precepts as their only value.

Among Christians the Gnostics were pioneers in this mode of interpreting and determining the permanent value of Scripture. They allegorised not only the Old Testament, but the Gospels. In all Scripture, according to them, there was concealed this hidden meaning, which was the only meaning of real value.

In Alexandria in particular, normal Christians were greatly drawn to this way of escape from the dilemma in which the Inspiration and the temporary value of the Old Testament seemed to involve them. In their allegorising they were not essentially different from the Gnostics, except in what they discovered to be the hidden meaning of passages.

Against the extreme allegorising of the Alexandrian school the Asiatic school protested, favouring a grammatico-historical exegesis.

Down to recent times, allegorising of Scripture in many quarters was often almost as extreme and absurd as in ancient Alexandria. There was a

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whole pseudo-science of Typology, and from the badgers' skins of the Tabernacle, the pitching within and without of the Ark, and so on, a perverted ingenuity was able to draw wonderful lessons.

As to the value to the Christian of considerable portions of the Old Testament, despite a plethora of most helpful books which have recently appeared, a problem remains unsolved and perhaps insoluble, save in so far as each individual, as his knowledge and spiritual experience grow, is able to solve it for himself. Each of us has a Scripture within the Scripture. Each of us, whether "radical" or "fundamentalist," tacitly leaves a good deal of the Old Testament out of account for any practical purpose, and even for reading. Of some passages nearly all would say with Marcion, "This is not inspired by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Few could set down in black and white the principles which guide their discrimination; or find it quite easy to justify them, supposing they could. Most rest content with that fine, ambiguous statement, "the Word of God is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments."

IX

MONTANISM

ABOUT the middle of the second century a considerable transformation had taken place both in the organisation of the Christian Church and in Christian life. As to the former, ecclesiastical offices had multiplied, clergy and laity were becoming sharply distinct, and the Bishops were supreme. The Church was hierarchial, and the primitive "liberty of prophesying" was fast becoming unknown. As to Christian life, a lowering of the standard was due to two causes. Belief in the speedy coming of the Lord had waned, and in consequence many Christians were more or less accommodating themselves to the life of the world. Further, while in the earliest days every member of the Church, won either from Judaism or heathenism, was sincerely persuaded in his own mind that he ought to submit to the high claims that the new religion made upon him, by this time there were many who had, so to say, been born Christian. Against this "secularising"

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of the Church, Montanism was a protest. It is best conceived as an attempt to return to what was characteristic of primitive days. It denied that there should or could be a helpful alliance between Christianity and pagan Philosophy or Culture. It was convinced that the end was at hand, and that out of the world and out of a too largely secularised Church true believers should gather to prepare by a stern discipline to meet the Lord.

The history of Montanus is tantalisingly obscure. Of few men whose names have passed into history is so little known as we know of him. Montanism had two great centres. We shall state what is known of its history in each, and then consider what the real significance of the movement was.

(a) Montanism in Asia Minor. Some time between 156 and 172 A.D., Montanus, an ex-priest of Cybele, recently converted to Christianity, appeared as a prophet and reformer in Phrygia. He had visions and spoke in the name of the Spirit in a state of ecstasy, fulminating against the worldliness of the Church and proclaiming the near advent of Christ. He represented himself as the promised Paraclete; and, as the organ of the Paraclete, laid

down rules of vigorous discipline for the true believer. Associated with him were two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, who also ecstatically prophesied like Montanus.

The "new prophecy," as it was called, made a great stir in Asia, and many Christians were won over. Of the Bishops some were favourable, others fiercely denounced it as delusion, and some tried to exorcise the demons that had possessed the prophetesses. By the end of 170 A.D., several Synods—the first regular Synods that the Church had known—had been held against Montanism and condemned it. On this, Montanus organised his followers into an independent community. He and the two prophetesses all died before 180 A.D. Stories told by their enemies that all came to "ill ends" may be safely set aside. The death of the prophet in no wise impeded the movement. The oracles of the prophet were collected and circulated as holy Scriptures.

Montanism made no impression in Greece, but leapt from Asia to Rome, where it made at first a favourable impression. One Bishop of Rome, either Eleutherius or his successor Victor, was on

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the point of declaring himself very sympathetically towards it, when the arrival of Praxeas, a bitter opponent of Montanism, put a new complexion on matters, and Montanism was condemned.

(*b*) Montanism in Africa. How Montanism spread to Africa is unknown, but there it won its most brilliant convert and defender in Tertullian (about 202 A.D.). The Montanism of Tertullian, however, is markedly different in many respects from that of Asia Minor. Tertullian has no acknowledgment of Montanus as the Paraclete. He believes in the new prophecy. But it is the puritanism of the movement which he maintains. As late as the fifth century there were "Tertullianists" in Carthage whom St. Augustine induced to return to the Catholic fold.

Such are almost all the meagre details we possess of the actual history of one of the most interesting and most influential movements in the Christian Church. What the movement meant, however, is our main interest.

From being something that strikes us, as it did many at the time, as mere eccentricity and fanaticism, Montanism as a movement became very im-

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portant, raising questions which to this day produce friction and schism. As the conflict between it and the Church proceeded, Montanism got rid of most of its extravagances and became aware of its real strength. On the other hand, in the process of controversy the Church became greatly transformed.

Montanus, we may suppose, started from two topics, on one or other or both of which a great many species of abnormal Christianity have taken their stand and still do so—the Paraclete and the Second Advent. He was convinced that he and his associated prophetesses were the divinely appointed completers of revelation. They were the lyres from which the hand of the Spirit drew forth music. In ecstasy they uttered their truth. In dream and vision the Spirit spoke to them. They found revived in their own experience the charismatic gifts described in the New Testament. When Montanus said, "I am the Father and the Son and the Paraclete," he had manifestly crossed the line which separates fervour from extravagance. When one prophetess declared that Christ, in the form of a woman, slept with her, she was on the verge of something more repulsive.

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Although Montanism was known as the New Prophecy, oracular prophetism soon ceased to be its characteristic feature. It was not so much perhaps the criticism of its opponents, formidable as that was, as the criticism of Time to which Montanism yielded; for Time declared against the truth of the message that Montanus proclaimed, that Christ was about to descend at Pepuza, where all the faithful should assemble to abide His coming.

Prophetism and Adventism might go, but the really vital point in Montanism now emerges. In order to meet Christ, Montanus held, Christians in a very literal sense should leave the world. They must greatly raise the standard of their unworldliness. Their lives must be much more austere, much more simple and holy. Let fastings be multiplied and more strictly observed. If marriages cannot be dissolved, let them who are married live as though they were not; let no man marry twice; and let virginity be specially honoured. Let all practise self-denial. Let persecution and martyrdom be not shunned but welcomed.

Here is where Montanism had something to say to which all Christians had to listen. At this point

there emerged a question between the Church and Montanism which has never been settled, both sides of which still claim their adherents. To the Montanists the world was doomed, perishing, and the very enemy of the kingdom. To the Catholic the world was destined to be saved so that all its kingdoms should become the Kingdom of our Lord. To the Montanist the world was a sphere of temptation, to the Catholic it was a field of opportunity.

Their respective views of the nature of the Church inevitably came to be just as divergent. To the Montanist the Church was God's vineyard, to be kept carefully purged of every weed; to the Catholic it was the drag-net in which a mixture of good and bad was to be expected. The parable of the wheat and the tares seemed expressly to warn the Church against any such scheme of drastic purging as Montanists proposed. The Church was not meant to be holy in the sense that every individual member should be holy before he was admitted, but in the sense that she was a school of holiness outside which none could be saved.

Those views of the Church, the purist and the Catholic respectively, took time to develop. They

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were helped by the schism of Novatian in the third century that arose over the question as to what was to be done in the case of the *Lapsi*—those who had yielded in time of persecution and renounced their Faith, and then desired re-admittance to the Church. Against moderation towards the *Lapsi* Novatianism was a fierce protest. Novatianist Churches sprang up all over the Empire and seem to have swept within their borders most of the original Montanist bodies. These bodies called themselves the *Cathari* in opposition to the Catholics. Thus it happened that when the Empire became Christian in the fourth century there were in existence two widespread though numerically unequal bodies both claiming to be the true Church.

Against the Catharists the influence of Constantine and later Emperors was directed. The weakness of the Catharists was that they had largely departed from the far-going reformation demanded by the Montanists, so that the type of life exhibited by their members was not noticeably different from that of the Catholic Church.

In the main it will be agreed that the Catholic Church was right in her view of the world and her

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conception of the Church. It might be easily shown that Montanism was unwarranted, impolitic, and impracticable. Yet the issue raised by Montanism put the Church in a dilemma. Many doubtless felt that, while Montanism might put things crudely and extravagantly, it expressed nevertheless what they themselves had been thinking. There was something which could not be set aside in this call to greater purity of the Church's membership and in the call to a life of self-denial. To many no doubt there seemed a good deal of risk that the world was transforming the Church more than she was transforming the world. The winning of representatives of the cultured classes to the Faith probably raised some difficulties in a few minds. It was all very well to be reminded of how Israel had spoiled the Egyptians, but this bringing of Greek culture and philosophy into the Church, had it not its dangers? What had Christ to do with Plato? What had the Christian to do with Homer, that text-book of heathenism? Still deeper anxiety must have been occasioned to many by the tendency which grew stronger as time passed for Church members to take part in worldly amusements.

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In face of Montanistic puritanism, as has been said, the Church was in a dilemma. How did she propose to do justice both to those who demanded that all innocent life should be open to them and that Greek culture was their birthright, and to those who felt themselves summoned to flee the world, with its pomps and shows, and tread the hard path of austerity?

Her solution was to recognise a two-fold morality; the easier for the laity, the more exigent and arduous for the clergy. In consequence, clergy and laity were now sharply distinguished in a new way. They are under different laws. Their spheres of duty are different, and, as result, their privileges. Of this distinction it may be said that it was one of the most momentous and most mischievous that the Church ever drew. It has, of course, in some sense persisted; and, however much a modern minister may resent it as unreasonable and fundamentally unsound, he must, if he be wise, take account of it.

The new conception of the Church as a school of holiness, not the society of the holy; and of membership of the Church as the pre-requisite of salvation, not the hallmark of the saved, tended to

make Church membership far more inclusive than it had formerly been. When in the fifth century paganism began to be forcibly suppressed, and in the sixth century infant baptism became general, membership of the Church and citizenship were—except for the Jews—practically co-extensive. Thus Harnack is not exaggerating when he says that as result of the conflict with Montanism, the Church was "*total geändert*"—completely transformed.

A further result of suspicion of the "New Prophecy" was the growth of the theory of an "Age of Inspiration." The conflict with Gnosticism led to the doctrine of a Canon of New Testament Scripture; that with Montanism to the view that no writing was inspired which did not originate either from Apostles or in their immediate following. The final test of the rule of Faith was agreement with Scripture; and, so far as the New Testament is concerned, Scripture was the body of writings traceable to the circle of Apostles. For such a view it is difficult to find any rational ground, but it has been the common view ever since.

One cannot study ancient Montanism without a deep sense of disappointment and almost tragedy.

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Montanus aimed at saying something of great value, and just missed it. His "higher life" turned out to be only a more stringent but quite conventional asceticism. His adventism, as time soon proved, was fantastic and fanatical. His inspirationism, which held that a passive, almost unconscious instrument played on by the Spirit was superior to a teacher in full command of all his faculties, and in particular his view that he himself was the Paraclete, were absurdities which obscured the truth that genuine spiritual endowment is a more essential qualification of a Christian minister than official ordination and the possession of culture. Such extravagances on the part of Montanus led merely to a confirming and deepening of the very abuses against which he was striving to make his voice heard.

Tertullian was free from such absurdities, but his too narrow views were much too harshly expressed, and there was something grotesque in one who was himself so widely read and so keen a logician railing against culture and philosophy.

The rise and development of monasticism provided for centuries the practical solution of the prob-

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lems raised. For all degrees of other-worldliness, puritanism and asceticism, the Monastic Orders could find room and offer some field of practical service. It was a work of consummate genius and foresight when the Church succeeded with so little trouble in taking under her own oversight and enlisting in her own service an originally non-ecclesiastical movement which in many cases was perhaps only somewhat less anti-Church than anti-world.

In the sixteenth century the old problems emerged to confront the Reformed Churches once more—the old demand for a pure Church membership, the old criticism of man-made ministers and worldly Churches. It is a problem which the Reformed Churches have as yet been unable to solve. No thoughtful Protestant can but regret that outside and often hostile to the Churches are so many excellent people grouped in little conventicles, incapable, by reason of their meagre resources and mutual distrusts, of doing much more for the Kingdom of God than just maintaining their own peculiar—sometimes very peculiar—testimony.

X

THE DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSY

ALTHOUGH, as we have seen, Gnosticism had a powerful influence in stimulating the development of Catholic doctrine, that influence must not be exaggerated. Had there been no Gnosticism, Christianity would still have necessarily developed in theology. That was inevitable as soon as it made firm contact with the Greek world.

The Church arrived at general agreement in its theology, which it came to summarise in Creeds, by a process of conflict of opinions. In some quarters views were expressed against which the common mind of Christians immediately protested as failing to do justice to Apostolic statements, or to Christian experience. Thus, as to the Person of Christ the general Christian mind felt that both the Ebionites, who denied the Lord's real Divinity, and the Docetes, who denied His true humanity, were wrong. The difficulty was to find a view which should avoid

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the errors of both, and be in itself intelligible and rationally tenable.

To deal in any fulness with the century-long controversy is here out of the question. We must be content with indicating its main features in its early stages.

THE PROBLEM

In the third century the problem was the Godhead rather than the Person of Christ, although the Godhead became a problem because of the conviction of Christians that Christ was Divine. The situation has commonly been misrepresented. What the theologians were concerned with was not primarily to secure our Lord's Divinity, but in view of His Divinity to safeguard monotheism. If Christ be Divine, what of monotheism, which it was of vital concern for Christians to maintain against the "gods many and lords many" of paganism? Of the Divinity of Christ there was no question. Christians found it clearly implied on every other page of St. Paul and in St. John. From the first it would seem that at least Gentile Christians prayed to Christ. How do prayers to Christ square with monotheism?

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That was the problem which the theologians of the third century set themselves to answer. In what way is Christ related to God? St. John had used two conceptions, the Logos and the Son; St. Paul adopted the latter. Are the Son and the Father two essentially separate beings, and, if so, have we not a ditheism?

HERETICAL VIEWS

It must be remembered that all the theologians who first handled this problem were pioneers. Only lengthy reflection revealed that the views of some of them were not such as the Church could adopt.

The "heretics" were those who were resolved to maintain monotheism by explaining the Divinity of Christ in such a way as not to infringe upon the Oneness of God. Of those views there were various types:

(a) Some, like the Alogi, Theodotus the Leather-merchant, and his name-sake the Banker, and Artemon held a view only a little higher than Ebionism—that Christ was a mere man filled with Divine power, not as the Ebionites held, from His Baptism onward, but from the beginning. They also, unlike

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the Ebionites, admitted His supernatural generation by the Holy Ghost. This type of view did not maintain itself for any length of time.

(*b*) Paul of Samosata (260 A.D.) denied the personality of the Logos and the Holy Spirit, and considered them merely powers of God, comparable to reason and mind in man. The Logos was more fully active in Christ than in any other man, and—here Paul anticipated the Socinians—Christ was worthy of worship because He was elevated to Divine dignity by His moral achievement. Paul was deposed for heresy at a Synod at Antioch in 278 or 279.

(*c*) Another group, including Praxeas (190 A.D.) and Noëtus, held that the one God became Man in Christ, so that the Son is the Father in the flesh. The Father Himself became Man and suffered—hence this view is called *Patripassianism*. The same being as Spirit is the Father; as flesh, the Son. For two reasons this view did not commend itself. To the Greek mind it was unthinkable that the supreme God could suffer; a suffering God would not be the all-perfect Being. Nor did the identification of Christ with the supreme Being do justice to Scrip-

ture. Against the one passage on which Praxeas laid such stress, "I and the Father are one," there are numerous passages in which our Lord Himself—to say nothing of the Epistles—distinguishes the Son from the Father.

(*d*) Most interesting of all is the view of Sabellius (200 A.D.). According to him, the one God manifests Himself in three aspects or rôles. In the giving of the Law, God was manifest as the Father; in redemption, as the Son; in the converting of men and the sanctification of believers, as the Holy Ghost. Those rôles were successive and exclusive. God ceased to be the Father when the Law was given; ceased to be the Son at the Ascension; will cease to be the Spirit when the work of sanctification is complete. Thereafter will remain the original One. This comes far short of the view which has strongly appealed to many since that time, viz. that we should posit only a Trinity of revelation or of experience—we know God in our experience as Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—but decline to affirm a Trinity of Essence. Sabellius, however, seems to have held another view not consistent with the one set forth—in which he compares the three aspects

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of the One God to the shape, light, and heat of the sun.

Sabellius raised more definitely than any predecessor the Trinitarian problem. Up to his time it had been—not indeed exclusively but mainly—a question concerning two Divine Beings, Father and Son. Henceforward it was the problem of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

THE ORTHODOX VIEW

Against all such views the Ante-Nicene Church came to general agreement, although positive "orthodox" views were still considerably indefinite. The heretical views conserved monotheism at the expense of the real and full and permanent Divinity of Christ. What the orthodox party did was to conserve the complete, original, and abiding Divinity of Christ at the cost of a perilous and easily misunderstood re-consideration of the unity of God. The idea was far from being altogether new; both Judaism and Greek philosophy had prepared the way for it. The view was that there is only one God, but that this does not necessarily mean that within

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the one Godhead there are no real distinctions. The great difficulty was to find appropriate terms which were not likely to mislead. In the one God are three—what?—more than aspects, more than attributes, more than rôles, but how express it to save the common man from thinking that by three Persons we mean three separate individuals who can exist apart from one another? That difficulty has proved to be a permanent one. In popular evangelism one frequently hears God and Christ so sharply, even antagonistically, separated as to justify a charge of ditheism.

SUBORDINATIONISM

The Ante-Nicene Church to distinguish the Son from the Father kept, especially in the East, by a view of some degree of inferiority or at least subordination of the Son. The Father was supreme, then came the Son, and, subordinate to both, the Holy Spirit. It would not have been granted by many that the Three were "equal in power and glory." Further, the statement that all are the "same in substance" was by many regarded with suspicion as savouring of Sabellianism or Patripassianism. It is

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noteworthy that the phrases and terms which became the very keywords of orthodoxy in the fourth century were in the third century nearly all suspect, and in some cases expressly condemned.

ORIGEN

The Ante-Nicene theology of the East was completed, we may say, in Origen. He was the first, so far as we know, to speak of Christ as the God-man, and to advance the doctrine that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. Yet Origen is by no means always consistent. He deprecated prayers to Christ. He held that to say that Christ came "out of the substance" of the Father was dangerous, as savouring of Gnostic emanation. He held that in a certain sense the incarnate Logos was a creation. He left room, in fact, for the whole Trinitarian and Christological questions being re-opened.

In the West, Dionysius of Rome (262 A.D.) came much nearer the orthodox doctrine of the fourth century. Origen's influence, however, was dominant in the East, where the great battle of the fourth and succeeding centuries was to be fought out.

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ARIUS AND ATHANASIUS

From Origen two opposed developments took place. From his subordinationism, Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, developed the views that Christ, though Creator of the world, was Himself created; that He was not of the substance of the Father; but was made out of nothing by the will of the Father. If He was begotten, said Arius, there must have been a time when He was not; and He was of different substance (*heteroousios*) than the Father.

From Origen's view of eternal generation, Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, and Athanasius (*d.* 373 A.D.), a deacon there, took the view that Christ was consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father, and that He was not a creation; "light of light" was a comparison of the relationship between the two. Of this view Athanasius became the great protagonist.

Arius was deposed and excommunicated by an Egyptian Synod in 321 A.D.; but he and his views had a great fascination for many. The controversy spread far and wide, and laymen as well as clergy took part in those abstruse discussions, which were

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carried on in the market-places, and parodied in
the theatre.

THE COUNCIL OF NICÆA

To conserve the unity of the Empire, Constantine was gravely concerned to re-establish unity among Christians. His pious admonitions to unity proving ineffective, he summoned all the Bishops of Christendom to meet in a great Council at Nicæa in 325 A.D., in order that they might arrive at harmony. Only a fraction, of course, of the total number of Bishops did or could attend, despite the provision that Constantine made for their comfort in travelling.

In the Council it speedily became manifest that there were three parties: (*a*) the Athanasians, few but very able; (*b*) the Arians, led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, also few in number, but with influential friends in high quarters; (*c*) a large middle or undecided party led by Eusebius of Cæsarea—the “father of Church history”—who objected to the Arian extreme of *heteroousios* and the creation of Christ, but objected equally to the *homoousios* of Alexander and Athanasius as being unscriptural materialistic, and reminiscent of Sabellianism.

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The Emperor took not only an interested but an active part in the discussions; and there can be no question that his influence led the majority of the Bishops to acquiesce in a decision with which they did not really agree, and which some of them certainly did not understand. Arianism was condemned, and the major portion of our familiar Nicene Creed became the finding of the Council to which subscription was required—the first occurrence of Creed subscription.

THE REACTION

Arianism, however, was far from dead. Court influence favoured it, and a strong reaction against Athanasius and *homoousios* set in. The solution was sought by many, not in the *heteroousios* of Arius, but in *homoiousios*—"of like substance"—which the Eusebian party adopted. For half a century the conflict raged. Bishop thundered against Bishop; Synod anathematised Synod. Heads were broken at Episcopal consecrations. The heathen made merry over the spectacle of the highways crowded with Bishops galloping from Synod to

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Synod in search of their Faith. Some who opposed Athanasius were genuinely afraid of Sabellianism; that their fears were not groundless was proved by the heresy of Marcellus and Photinus, friends of Athanasius and strong opponents of Arius. Arianism, however, was strong mainly because of Imperial favour. The weight of solid argument and the deepest, most genuine religious instincts and convictions were on the side of Athanasius.

After long controversy, of which all were weary, the question was settled in the orthodox sense at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D., and our so-called Nicene Creed was published by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

During the period of Arian ascendancy the Teutonic tribes were evangelised. Among them Arianism continued till the end of the sixth century.

CHRISTOLOGY

The question as to the relationship of Son and Father was no sooner settled than the older question—parent of the Trinitarian problem—revived. What of the Person of Christ? If He is both human and

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Divine, how are the two sides related, and how is the unity of His Person to be maintained? Has He a human Body within which the Logos takes the place of human reason, as Apollinarius taught (362 A.D.)? Are the two natures quite separate, as Nestorius (428 A.D.) was erroneously supposed to maintain? Are the two natures confused, as Eutyches (444 A.D.) held? Is the unity of His person to be maintained by saying that He had only one will, as the Monotheletes (seventh century) argued?

Over such questions bitter strife raged till the eighth century. We can here only say that they are excusable who think that the discussion was carried much too far into a region of speculation in which words cease to be the counters of thought; and that before the controversy died down, rather than was settled, the Eastern Church was rent into fragments—Orthodox, Armenian, Nestorian, Jacobite, Maronite—which have remained separate ever since; while the Eastern Empire was more than once shaken to its foundations and so permanently weakened that this theological strife is undoubtedly one factor of importance in the phenomenally rapid and easy conquest of Egypt and Asia by Islam.

XI

THE VICTORY AND THE AFTERMATH

THE toleration granted and the increasing favour shown to the Church by Constantine were hailed by Christians with pæans of triumph. The Lord had done great things for them whereof they were glad. The question, however, arises—what did the victory cost? Admitting that it was a victory for the Church, was it much of a victory for Christianity at all? Opinions will differ. It is obvious that the changed condition of things at once presented the Church with a larger opportunity, and confronted Churchmen with new and strong temptations; and it is difficult to estimate how far the seizing of the new opportunity was counter-balanced by yielding to the new temptations. It is fair to remark that the secularisation of the Church was very far advanced before the Empire was won. Did the Church come to power by transforming the world or by conforming to it? or had both by their interaction been so changed that the Church could take charge

of the world without the world being conscious of any great shock? These are real questions, to which diverse answers may be given. What is fairly clear is that after the first rejoicings were over a deep sense of disillusionment took hold of many Christians. Cæsar had become a Christian but there seemed very little change in the world. The new state of things was not very markedly different from the old. A few changes certainly took place. More splendid Churches were built. The Church received large gifts for her charitable activities. The Lord's Day by decree of Cæsar became a day of rest for the law-courts and public offices. The condition of slaves was ameliorated. Animal sacrifices ceased. In other respects life went on pretty much as it did before. Multitudes followed Cæsar in adhering to the Church, but the Empire was not noticeably much more like the Kingdom of God. The extraordinary growth of monasticism from the fourth century onwards cannot be explained apart from the wide prevalence of this disappointment. It must have seemed to many that instead of the Church transforming the world, the world was likelier to master the Church.

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THE CHURCH AND THE CHRISTIAN STATE

There emerged, too, a new problem which is not yet finally settled—that of the relations of the Church to a Christian State. Between the two extremes—that which makes the Church a branch of the Civil Service and that which makes the State the executive of the Church—the conflict has been waged for sixteen centuries, and all sorts of intermediate positions have been sought. The cause of human freedom has required its defenders to look with hope sometimes to the Church to save it from a tyrannical State, sometimes, and perhaps oftener, to the State to impose effective limits on the tyranny of the Church.

What happened in ancient times, at any rate in the East and particularly in the See of Constantinople, was that the Church lost her real freedom. Imperial influence and Court intrigues often played a disgracefully large part not only in the election of Patriarchs and Bishops, but in their management of purely ecclesiastical questions. It was the happiness of the See of Rome, and one powerful factor in her rise to supremacy, that being free of Byzan-

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tine Court influence, she could speak with the authority which deliberate consideration of the merits of a question alone could give.

That the State should be Christian is a position which is not contemplated and certainly not provided for in the New Testament. The saying of our Lord's, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," has been often quoted as though it solved the problem of Church and State. It is doubtful if it has any bearing on the problem at all. It is not clear that a saying which refers to the visible Cæsar and the Invisible King can have much reference to the situation as between two visible institutions, the Church and the State. Apart from that, it is obvious that the saying casts no light on the solution of the problem, which it merely re-states in another way. What are the things of Cæsar? Nay, more; what are the things of Cæsar that are not the things of God? The upholders of diametrically opposed theories of the relations of Church and State not only had this saying before them, they fancied they were doing justice to it.

It has been so often asserted in modern times that

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St. Paul dreamed of Christianity becoming the religion of the Empire, that it has almost passed into an axiom, but the evidence is sadly scanty. It was the Old Testament, with its theocratic kings guided and directed by priest or prophet, that afforded an analogy. Here too, then, was a new occasion for Christianity turning back overmuch to the Old Testament. As it was enjoined on Jewish kings to root out idolatry, so Christian monarchs were urged to extirpate heathenism, and by and by heresy.

MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

Peace and State patronage gave the Church an opportunity of which on the whole she nobly took advantage to carry her propaganda not only through the entire populace of the Empire, but among peoples beyond. After a long struggle which involved far more martyrdoms than the mastery of the Roman Empire, toleration was won in Persia. With little difficulty the Teutonic and Slavonic tribes, destined soon to burst the frontiers of the tottering Roman Empire, were at least strongly tinctured with Christianity, although

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as we have noted, the Christianity of the Western tribes was Arian. It meant much for the preservation of civilisation and the cultural gains of a long past that the tribes who were to become the future nations of Europe were so far Christianised before they swept like a flood through Gaul, Italy, Spain, and Africa.

CHANGES IN ORGANISATION

The Christianising of the whole population of the Empire led to an important change. Up to the fourth century, Christianity had been almost exclusively a religion of the cities. Henceforward that ceases. Some progress had indeed been made in evangelising the villages and rural parts before peace was won; and when any considerable body of Christians had been secured, there a deputy Bishop (*Chorepiscopus*) with very limited responsibilities had been appointed to take charge of them. Apart from the city and such suburban charges the Bishop had no diocese. Now, however, the situation was transformed. The Bishop received a territorial diocese; the *Chorepiscopus* disappeared; the responsibility

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of the Presbyters was greatly increased. The Presbyter was entrusted, subject to the Bishop's oversight, with full charge of a congregation, with power of administering the sacraments. The old custom, prevalent in cities where several congregations existed, of sending the consecrated elements from the Bishop's Church to the others, ceased. Only in the West the Bishop retained sole power of confirming catechumens.

To the development of a hierarchy superior to the Bishop reference has already been made.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While, in all the conflicts we have considered, the Church was victorious, in no case was the victory complete. From each the Church emerged in some respect or other a very different entity. It was the conflicts that made her to a great extent what she was. Further, each conflict either left some question unanswered or raised new ones. The Judaisers and the Gnostics, Montanus and Marcion, all set problems which have from time to time re-emerged, are not yet finally solved, and, so far as we can see, are

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not likely to be solved. Our thought moves as best it may between antinomies, not a few pairs of which are in the New Testament itself.

Some of us may think that Judaisers and Gnostics won more than they ought, and Montanism and Marcionism less than they deserved; that the ancient Catholic Church was to a dangerous degree Judaised, Hellenised, and secularised. Protestants will be confident that time revealed that. The great marvel of the Church's history has been that, however corrupt the Church might become, she retained within herself the power of self-purification. In this self-reforming power Christianity is unique among religions. With one doubtful exception—the possible influence of Islam in stimulating the great outburst against image worship in the ninth century—Christian reforms have been inspired by Christianity itself, and made effective by Christians; and reform has consisted in purging out alien elements that had found entrance.

Yet this very consideration has misled many into the pathetic illusion that the cure for all the divisions and other ills of the Church is to be sought in a return to the "primitive." Back to Christ, back to

the New Testament, back to the undivided Church, are the watchwords of such. It is all fatuous and futile. It is as though a grown man, bitterly conscious that he is not now so near heaven as when he was a boy, were seriously proposing to himself the impossible task of returning to his childhood. We can no more go back to the "primitive" than we can reproduce all the conditions of the first century. Even if we could do that, the conflicts would all have to be fought out again. Back to the primitive?—the Ebionites were just those who refused to move from the primitive. Back behind the mistakes of Christ's followers to Christ Himself?—that was what Porphyry and, later on, Mohammed suggested. Back to the New Testament?—every heretic thought he was doing justice to Scripture texts. Back to the undivided Church?—it never existed in the sense that all Christians were uniform in either Faith or practice; such imposing unity and uniformity as were manifested over large areas in later days were attained only when the Catholic Church secured the strength of the civil arm in suppressing heresy and schism.

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